

Our Relationships with Animals

Overview and chapter summaries

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Overview

This book is about the nature and moral significance of the diverse array of relationships that exist between humans and animals. In Part I, we propose and defend new ideas about relationships and their moral significance; the result is a general ethical theory that we call *relationalism*. Because of relationalism's generality, it applies to how we humans ought to treat each other as well as to how we ought to treat animals. In Part II, we apply relationalism to problems within animal ethics, focusing on areas where we think the moral significance of human-animal relationships has not been adequately appreciated. Because the book develops a general theory and then applies it, the book bridges two subdisciplines of moral philosophy: normative ethical theory and applied ethics.

The central concept of the book is that of a relationship—a concept that remains under-analyzed despite being of central importance in many major traditions in moral philosophy. Philosophers have spent a great deal of effort developing analyses of certain *types* of relationships.¹ (Unsurprisingly, these analyses tend to focus on human-human relationships, but there has also been significant work on human-animal relationships as well.²) But there's a shortage of analyses of the concept of a relationship as such.

¹ For example, there is a literature on the nature of friendship extending all the way back to Aristotle's discussion in Book VIII of *Nicomachean Ethics* and which remains very active (e.g., (Annas 1977; Hurka 2006; Alfano 2016)) and there are equally active literatures on romantic relationships (e.g., (Delaney 1996; Kolodny 2003; Jenkins 2017)), parenthood (e.g., (Blustein 1997; Millum 2010; Brake 2015)), citizenship (e.g., (Cohen 2016; Carens 2000)), and many other types of relationships.

² Recent work focusing on human-animal relationships include Lori Gruen (2015) and Barbro Fröding and Martin Peterson (2011).

There is no generally accepted analysis of the concept of a relationship, nor is there a robust debate about what such an analysis should look like; but there are at least two truisms about relationships that are uncontroversial among philosophers who take relationships seriously. First truism: Relationships, both between humans and between humans and animals, are diverse. A relationship between a mother and her daughter is a very different thing from a relationship between a teacher and a student or between two next-door neighbors or between fellow citizens of the same country or between a shepherd and the sheep in her flock or between a research scientist and the rats she uses in her experiments. Indeed, relationships are so diverse that it is unclear whether there is anything that all relationships have in common.

Second truism: Relationships differ from mere *relations*. If Sandra is standing to Steve's right on a subway platform, then Steve bears the 'left-of' relation to Sandra; but that does not mean that there is any true *relationship* between Steve and Sandra at all. The notion of a relationship is fuller, narrower, and more substantive than the simple logical notion of a relation.

While useful, these truisms fall far short of a theory of the nature of relationships. One of the major contributions of this book is to defend such a theory. According to our theory, relationships are to be understood in terms of collectives: If A and B are in a relationship, this is in virtue of A and B being co-constituents of some collective C. (See below, particularly the summary of Chapter 2, for more detail on the main claims of this theory.) In developing this theory, we are breaking ground by bringing current literature in social ontology on the metaphysics and ethics of collectives (e.g., (Collins 2019; Lawford-Smith 2015; Chant 2015;

Killoren and Williams 2013; List and Pettit 2011; Ritchie 2013)) into new points of contact with the philosophy of relationships.³

Our theory of the nature of relationships lies at the basis of the ethical theory that we develop in this book—relationalism. The core of relationalism is the simple and intuitive thought (widely endorsed by many philosophers and by many non-philosophers) that relationships make a moral difference. For example, your obligations to your mother differ from your obligations to your accountant and they do so in part because of your differing relationships to them.

Relationalism departs from utilitarianism in that relationalism says that the moral significance of relationships cannot be fully explained in terms of consequences associated with relationships. To illustrate, take a case where you have two choices: A or B. A would benefit your mother to some degree, while B would benefit your accountant to precisely the same degree (and no one else will be affected by your decision).⁴ Then, according to standard-issue utilitarianism, given that the consequences of A are no better or worse (in terms of the usual utilitarian harm-benefit analysis) than the consequences of B, this case is a toss-up: you can permissibly do either A or B. By contrast, according to relationalism, you might be morally

³ A main thematic precedent for our view is what is known as the union view of love, according to which love involves some sort of union: a “we” (Nozick 1990), a “community” (Scruton 1987), or a “federation of selves” (Friedman 1998). There are many differences between our view and the union view of love. The most obvious difference is that we’re offering an account of relationships in general, not an account of love in particular. A deeper difference is that collectives differ fundamentally from unions. The notion of a collective as it figures in our account, unlike the notion of a union as it figures in the union view of love, does not require any cooperative activity or even mutual recognition to occur among the members. A collective on our conception is just a reasons-bearing group of individuals; a group of individuals can form a collective without even knowing of one another’s existence. By contrast, the sort of union that exists in loving relationships according to the union view is supposed to be known and affirmed by the individuals in the union and is supposed to be a part of their self-identity (as it would be in, e.g., a loving marriage). These are just a few of the reasons why our view of relationships is altogether different from the union view of love. Nevertheless, in developing our view, we have much to gain from engagement with both defenders of and critics of the union view of love.

⁴ Here our discussion will, of course, connect with the extensive discussions surrounding Williams’s “one thought too many” argument (Smart and Williams 1800) and (Mason 1999).

obligated to do A rather than B (or, for that matter, to do B rather than A) in virtue of the difference between your relationship with your mother and your relationship with your accountant.

The idea that relationships matter morally—and matter in ways that utilitarianism cannot capture—is well-represented in the deontological tradition in moral philosophy. There are two main strands of traditional deontological views about relationships, which we dub the theoretical school and the folk school. Relationalism differs from each of these, in ways we will now explain.

Philosophers in what we call the theoretical school begin by observing that certain folk types of relationships—e.g., mother-daughter, employer-employee, citizen-citizen, friend-friend, etc.—seem to matter morally. They then proceed to explain the moral significance of these folk types in terms of some other, allegedly more fundamental, types of relationships. Among philosophical giants of the 20th century, W.D. Ross (1930) is the most influential philosopher of this school. His seven-or-so *prima facie* duties each represent a different type of relationship, and the moral dimensions of folk types of relationships are explained in terms of one or more of the relationships represented in his *prima facie* duties. The theoretical school is alive and well; Garrett Cullity (2018) is currently the most important and sophisticated philosopher of this school. He wants to explain the moral significance of folk types of relationships in terms of three more fundamental types of relationships: concern, respect, and cooperation. Care ethics might be

classified as a tradition in this school as well, although care ethicists typically focus on relationships of dependency without attempting to give an exhaustive theory.⁵

Philosophers in the folk school, like philosophers in the theoretical school, take it as a datum of ethics that folk types of relationships are morally important. But unlike the theoretical school, those in the folk school do not seek to explain the importance of folk types in terms of their connection or reducibility to some more fundamental types. Instead, they proceed as if the folk types themselves are of fundamental significance. Among contemporary writers, an example of a particularly clear-eyed and insightful philosopher in the folk school is Simon Keller (Keller 2013).

To illustrate the difference between these schools, take the mother-daughter relationship. For a philosopher in the theoretical school, that relationship matters because it falls under some wider, more theoretical type. For example, perhaps the mother-daughter relationship is understood as a type of Cullity-style relationship of concern and is taken to be morally important for that reason. By contrast, for a philosopher in the folk school, the moral significance of the mother-daughter relationship needn't be derived from its subsumption under some wider theory-given type; it can matter in its own right.

Theorists in the folk school typically do not try to offer any view of what all relationship types have in common; nor do they offer a view of what distinguishes relationships from mere

⁵ The central moral claim of care ethics is that dependency generates special responsibilities (see (Collins 2015)). For the care ethicist, the moral significance of folk types of relationships such as mother-daughter, neighbor-neighbor, etc., derives *at least in part* from the more fundamental relationship of (inter-)dependency that (typically) exists in relationships of these folk types. However, care ethicists do not usually claim and are not usually committed to the view that all moral dimensions of all relationships can be spelled out in terms of dependency. This is to be contrasted with a theorist like Cullity, who does want to claim that his fundamental relationship types (concern, respect, and cooperation) exhaust all of the inherently morally important types.

relations. They simply accept the common-sense idea that certain folk types of relationships (mother-daughter, friend-friend, neighbor-neighbor, etc.) are genuine relationships while others, e.g., the ‘left-of’ relation, are not. Importantly, this is also the case for the theoretical school. True, theorists in the theoretical school typically subsume each of the many different folk types of relationships under a smaller handful of wider theoretical types. But there isn’t typically an explanation of what *those* types have in common. So, both the folk school and the theoretical school lack a certain kind of unity. By contrast, our theory—relationalism—contains an account of what all genuine relationships have in common and thus achieves a level of unity that other theories, even the best-developed theories in the theoretical school, are lacking.

The development and defense of that theory is the purpose of Part I of the book. Part II’s purpose is to apply that theory in animal ethics. Part II is conservative in some respects and radical in others. It is conservative in that we end up supporting a number of commonly held views about humans’ treatment of animals. For example, we argue that there is nothing inherently wrong with using animals for human purposes. Although this view is contrary to the views of many prominent advocates for animal rights such as Gary Francione (1995; G. Francione and Garner 2010), it’s consistent with the views of many ordinary people. At the same time, the project is radical in that we attack many commonly held views and provide novel explanations for why some commonly held views are mistaken. For example, we argue that many extremely widespread modern practices in animal agriculture are deeply unethical, even in a great many cases where the animals’ lives are worth living and are significantly better than the lives of their wild counterparts.

A note about the ambitions of our project. A theory can prove its value by solving problems, and we intend our theory—relationalism—to have some of that sort of value. But solving

problems is only one of many ways a theory can be valuable. Sometimes a theory is valuable in virtue of its ability to explain why solutions to certain problems are elusive or even impossible. If a theory makes a hard problem seem too easy, or if it allows us to answer certain difficult questions too readily, then that can reveal that the theory is defective. In many places in this book, we rely on relationalism not to yield quick and easy answers to hard questions in animal ethics, but instead to help us to understand why some questions in animal ethics often appear to be intractable.

Summaries of Parts and Chapters

Part I: Relationalism

Our project is firmly situated within the nonconsequentialist tradition; we reject thoroughgoing utilitarianism for the usual sorts of reasons (e.g., its odious implications regarding the permissibility of instituting a Harris-style survival lottery (1975)). Yet we also hold that extant nonconsequentialist approaches in animal ethics are inadequate. Both traditional and contemporary animal rights theories fail to fully account for intuitively plausible views about the moral differences between animals and humans. In fact, utilitarian accounts of our obligations to animals are often more intuitively attractive than rights-based accounts. Consider sacrificial dilemmas: cases where one must choose to kill one animal or to allow many more to die. Suppose you are in charge of an animal sanctuary and you must decide whether to kill one animal infected with a deadly virus or risk allowing the virus to spread to many others. In such a case, the utilitarian's judgment (do what's best for all of the individuals affected by your decision, even if that means killing the one to save the many) seems eminently sensible to many people, whereas the rights theorist's conviction that animals' rights to life and bodily autonomy

might restrict us from doing what has the best consequences for all of the animals whose interests are at stake in the case seems otiose to many people.⁶

Given that many consider it permissible to sacrifice the one to save the many in a wide range of sacrificial dilemmas involving animals but not in analogous cases involving humans, it is reasonable to consider a hybrid view of the sort that Nozick calls “Utilitarianism for animals, Kantianism for people,” which says (roughly) that some form of utilitarianism ought to guide our treatment of animals but some form of deontology ought to guide our treatment of human beings.⁷ Indeed, such a view underlies commonly held opinions about animal use as well as many institutions of animal use in contemporary society (Killoren and Streiffer 2020).

However, in Chapter 1, we argue that—although the hybrid view has many attractive features—it nonetheless has to be rejected. We develop relationalism as an alternative to the hybrid view and argue that it has many of the benefits of the hybrid view while avoiding many of the hybrid view’s serious problems. Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 are devoted to elaborating and defending relationalism.

Chapter 1: Beyond the Uerson/Derson Distinction

Our discussion in this chapter begins with a novel characterization of the Nozick-style hybrid view. We maintain that this view’s most important commitment is to a type of moral status pluralism. Specifically, the commitment is that there are two different sorts of moral statuses that beings can have, which we call ‘uersonhood’ and ‘dersonhood.’ An individual is a *uerson* if her

⁶ For example, despite efforts by Tom Regan to make his view consistent with the intuitively plausible view that you should sacrifice one dog to save five humans in a lifeboat case, he ultimately fails to do so (1983, 324–25).

⁷ (Nozick 1974, 35–42).

interests matter but she has no genuine moral rights; an individual is a *derson* if her interests matter *and* she has genuine moral rights.⁸ The hybrid view says that these two types of moral status exist and further says that all or most animals are *uersons*, whereas all or most humans are *dersons* (Killoren and Streiffer 2020).

The principal advantage of the hybrid view is that it can explain why it seems (to many people) that it is often easier to justify optimifically harming one animal for the sake of many others than to justify optimifically harming one human for the sake of many others. However, in order to secure this advantage, the hybrid view requires there to be some difference between animals and humans that could explain why most animals have *uerson* status whereas most humans have *derson* status. The bulk of our effort in Chapter 1 is devoted to discussion of a range of the most promising and widely discussed such differences. We consider a number of surprisingly promising possibilities here, but we show that none of the proposals are ultimately capable of doing the needed work.

Further, we observe that the hybrid view is complicated by the fact that our intuitions about some animals suggest that we see them as *dersons*, not *uersons*. Specifically, we view animals with whom we have special relationships—such as our pet dogs and cats—in a more *derson*-like than *uerson*-like way. Yet it is difficult to see why such relationships would affect animals' moral status, given that moral status is supposed to depend entirely on an individual's intrinsic properties (McMahan 2005). Such observations make hybrid views difficult to defend. We

⁸ 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.

conclude that some alternative theory is needed that could capture the intuitions that motivate the hybrid view while avoiding its serious disadvantages.

Chapter 2: Relationalism Explained

One of our primary criticisms of the hybrid view in Chapter 1 is that it has difficulty explaining why our obligations to animals seem to be affected by our relationships with animals. This motivates the next stage of our project, which is to develop and defend a general theory about the moral significance of relationships. In Chapter 2, we lay out this theory; in Chapter 3, we defend it (and show that it is better than the Nozick-style hybrid view discussed in Chapter 1).

The view we defend—relationalism—has three components. The first component is the idea that relationships interact with reasons provided by interests to produce directed moral obligations (i.e., obligations of an agent to another individual or group): $O=R+R(I)$.

$O=R+R(I)$ is a complex idea involving several commitments. The first of these is that others' interests provide us with reasons. The fact that someone needs help, for example, is a reason to offer help to them. And all else equal, the stronger one's interests, the weightier the reasons provided by those interests. The second major commitment of $O=R+R(I)$ is that the 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. For example, if B is A's spouse, then this—in conjunction with the fact that B needs help—might generate an obligation for A to help B. But if B is what we call a *moral*

stranger of A (where two individuals are moral strangers iff they have no relationship to one another) then B cannot have any obligations to A.⁹

So, the central thought in $O=R+R(I)$ is that interests and relationships have different normative powers: interests provide reasons; relationships make moral obligations out of the reasons provided by interests. Relationships, therefore, do not themselves provide reasons. If your spouse is drowning, for example, the reason to help her is that she needs help; the fact that she is your spouse is not any sort of reason to help her, even though that fact would enter into the explanation of why you have a moral obligation to help her. (In denying that relationships provide reasons, we're endorsing views ably defended Keller (2013), although we also depart from Keller in key ways—see note 9.)

The plausibility of $O=R+R(I)$ depends in significant part on how widespread relationships are. For if relationships are very rare, then $O=R+R(I)$ will implausibly imply that directed moral obligations are very rare. But we argue that nearly everyone has some sort of relationship to nearly everyone else. What's important is that, even if (as we believe) relationships are nearly ubiquitous, not all relationships are created equal. Different relationships have dramatically

⁹ The idea here needs to be distinguished from the views of Simon Keller (2013). Keller believes that others and their interests have *value*, but their interests do not provide us with reasons unless we are in a special relationship with them. That is, relationships enable others' interests to provide us with reasons. This view, as Errol Lord (2015) has observed, comes with some disturbing implications: it means that if someone is truly a moral stranger to you, then you have no reason whatsoever to help them, even if you have no reasons whatsoever to do otherwise. Our view has no such implications. For us, if someone has an interest in being helped by you, then you automatically have a reason to help them. The main role of relationships is to turn reasons provided by interests into moral obligations. The role of moral obligations, in turn, is a complex matter, and one that we have much to say about in the book. We hold, for a start, that moral obligations play a key role in proper adjudication of conflicting reasons. When you have a reason to help Steve and a reason to help Wanda and you can't do both, then it matters whether you have a moral obligation to help one of these individuals rather than the other. By contrast, if you have a reason to help Steve and no reason to do anything else, then the question of what you ought to do is already settled. The question of whether moral obligations have any role to play in decision-making over and above the role played by reasons is taken up in a section of this chapter. In addressing this question we enter into the recent debate on so-called 'moral fetishism'; we take a particular stand in that debate and offer novel arguments for it.

different deontic implications, in terms of both the strength and the content of obligations that arise from those relationships.

The second component of relationalism is (as far as we know) new in the literature on relationships. It is what we call the *Collectivity Theory of Relationships*. According to 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, as we wish to understand the term, is a group of individuals that has reasons for action that are not identical to the reasons of any of the individuals within the collective.¹⁰ For example, a married couple is typically a collective in this sense: a married couple taken together can have reasons that differ from the reasons possessed by either of the individuals in the marriage. Other examples of collectives include nations, sports teams, corporations, and military units. According to our theory, the nature of a relationship between individuals A and B is determined by two factors: the nature of their shared collective, C, and the role that A and B each play in C. Thus, for example, if Anna is Wanda's superior officer in the Army, the nature of their relationship is a function of the nature of the Army and of their differing roles in the Army.

The third component of relationalism is what we call the *Role Theory of Obligations*. It is commonly thought that one is obligated to "do one's part" as a member of whatever collectives one is a part of (Collins 2019; Collins and Lawford-Smith 2016; Killoren and Williams 2013; Chant 2014).

¹⁰ (Feinberg 1974; Cahen 1988) both insist on an independence clause in analogous situations. For recent discussion on group's reasons for actions, see (Chant 2014; Fiebich 2020; Roth 2020).

The central idea here is that, when you are a member of a collective, you have an obligation to play some role in bringing it about that the collective responds rightly to its reasons. For example, if you are part of an academic department, and the department has sufficient reason to develop a minor, then you will typically be morally obligated to do your part to help the department develop a minor. Many philosophers have taken the obligation to do one's part as highly important in understanding the normative relation between collectives and individuals. The Role Theory says that *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.

Determining what is required in order to do one's part is often a messy and difficult problem. Suppose you are a member of a family and suppose that a debt of \$20,000 is owed on the family home. Then it seems plausible to say that you have a moral obligation to do your part to ensure that the debt is repaid. But how can you determine what is required to do your part? It would be a mistake to simply divide the debt equally among all family members and to say that each must pay an equal share. Different individuals in a family have different roles (e.g., the children, parents, and grandparents all typically have different roles) and these roles determine what doing their part requires. Importantly, roles for us are normative facts; they are not just a matter of convention.¹¹

¹¹ For example, suppose you are an executive in a tobacco company in the 1950s and you are in possession of research showing that tobacco causes cancer. It may be that your role as conventionally understood is to conceal this research. But we want to maintain that convention in a case like this is mistaken. The tobacco company is a collective that has reasons (provided by the interests of smokers who are dying of cancer) to make the research public. As a member of that collective, your role is to do your part in making it the case that the collective responds rightly to its reasons. Being a whistleblower might fit that description; concealing the research almost certainly doesn't. As this example shows, our theory does not imply or require that agents' roles in collectives are determined by convention. But our picture is complicated. We also maintain that convention is *part* of what gives shape to agents' roles. Here we find the literature on role responsibilities and professional ethics, which we draw upon and

Because it is not always easy to determine what doing one's part requires, the Role Theory of Obligations offers no simple and easy formula by which to determine the content of one's obligations to others. What the Role Theory offers instead is a starting point for moral reflection: it says that if one wants to know what one owes to one's friends, one's children, one's fellow citizens, one's coworkers, etc., then one needs to reflect on the collectives to which one belongs, the roles one has in those collectives, and the moral demands that come along with those roles. In the chapter we consider these issues in detail and with attention to real-world cases.

Relationalism raises many questions that it does not try to answer. For example, although relationalism posits that we are morally obligated to do our part in the collectives to which we belong, it does not contain any explanation of *why* that is so. That question, we'll show, can be answered in many different ways using resources from many different ethical traditions; at a certain level of abstraction, relationalism has a surprisingly high degree of theoretical flexibility. Our narrow (yet still plenty ambitious) aim in this chapter and in the next is to develop and defend the three components of relationalism—O=R+R(I), the Collectivity Theory, and the Role Theory—and even if we are successful in that aim, we will necessarily leave a number of questions left unanswered.

extend (Applbaum 1990), to be very useful in developing our position. This is perhaps a good place to briefly address the metaethical stance of this project. First, we're offering a first-order moral theory, not a metaethical theory; we hope that our theory will be coherent with all plausible metaethical views. However we will be especially at pains throughout the book to ensure that our theory is fully consistent with a thoroughly and robustly realist point of view.

Chapter 3: Relationalism Elaborated and Defended

Our discussion in this chapter starts by picking up a thread from Chapter 1. We argue that the intuitions that motivate the hybrid view can be explained in terms of relationalism without a need to invoke moral status pluralism, and that this is a major count in favor of relationalism. The key premise of our argument here is that our relationships with animals are often significantly different from our relationships to one another: the relationship between, say, an orphanage director and the children in her charge typically differs in significant ways from the relationship between the director of a sanctuary for rescued pigs and the animals in her charge. And these sorts of differences, we argue, can be recruited to explain the sorts of intuitions that make the hybrid view seem attractive in the first place without needing to posit a diversity of types of moral status. And we contend this is a major improvement over the hybrid view, given the implausibility of moral status pluralism.

But of course, even if we successfully show that relationalism is better than the hybrid view, this does not mean that relationalism is true. Our defense of relationalism has two components: First, we consider and answer a series of objections to the view. Second, we argue that relationalism earns its keep: it unifies and explains a wide variety of different familiar commitments of deontological ethics. In particular, we argue that relationalism can be used to furnish plausible and illuminating accounts of (1) moral status, (2) moral rights, (3) the doing/allowing distinction, (4) the moral significance of use, and (5) conflicts among moral obligations.

We propose that to have moral status is simply to be the kind of being who can enter into relationships with moral agents. The moral differences often interpreted as reflecting or constituting a hierarchy of moral status or as differing degrees of moral status are, we argue,

better understood as stronger and weaker (in terms of scope or strength) obligations resulting from differing kinds of relationships. There is no need to appeal to a notion of moral status that is independent of relationships. We show that this account captures many of the intuitions that have motivated the notion of moral status, improves on other accounts of moral status such as Shelley Kagan's much-discussed hierarchical view of moral status (2019), and avoids the problems that motivate skeptics of moral status such as Oscar Horta (2017) and Benjamin Sachs (2011).

We propose that moral rights can be understood in terms of obligations deriving from relationships. Consider a positive right such as a child's right against their parents to be cared for. On our account, that right is nothing over and above the fact that others who have certain relationships with the child (in this case, the child's parents) are morally obligated, in virtue of those relationships, to care for the child. We argue that a wide range of different moral rights can be similarly understood in terms of relationships in this way. We have an account of negative rights as well as positive rights.¹² And we argue that this theory of moral rights is superior to several extant accounts of moral rights (Feinberg 1970; Regan 1983; Raz 1984; Thomson 1990; Wenar 2005).

¹² The core idea of our account of negative rights can be illustrated with a paradigm example of a negative right: the right not to be tortured. One might think that this right cannot be captured in relationalist terms because this right constrains *everyone*, including moral strangers. Even if Martha has never met Steve, has never interacted with Steve, and lives on the other side of the planet from Steve, Martha still has a right against Steve not to be tortured by Steve. Here's how we want to account for this. If an individual A tortures another individual B, that very act creates a certain relationship between A and B. (A and B might be moral strangers before A tortures B; but the moment A begins to torture B, they are moral strangers no longer.) It is in virtue of that relationship, together with the fact that B has a weighty interest in not being tortured, that A's act of torturing B is deeply immoral. Thus relationalism can explain why it would be wrong for *anyone* to torture B, whether they have a prior relationship with B or not. And that fact—the fact that it would be wrong for anyone to torture B—just is B's right not to be tortured. Or so we wish to argue. This is what we might call a *relationalist reduction* of the right not to be tortured; we'll argue in the book that relationalist reductions of all negative rights are possible.

To illustrate our relationalist account of the doing/allowing distinction, consider two actions: (A) Failing to donate to famine relief, with the consequence that one child in a famine-afflicted country dies of starvation; (B) getting into a plane, flying to that same country, and strangling that same child to death. The latter is a doing; the former is an allowing. The latter is intuitively wrong; the former is intuitively not wrong or not as seriously wrong. On our account, the latter action is far more seriously wrong because, in targeting the child and strangling her to death, one forms a type of relationship with her that makes the action far more seriously wrong than it would be otherwise. Broadly, our account says that doing often involves relationships that are not involved in mere allowing, and this is why doing often seems morally different than allowing, even when the consequences of doing are similar to the consequences of allowing. This account, we will argue, is superior to the main extant accounts of the doing/allowing distinction (Bennett 2011; Hurley 2019; McMahan 1993; 1998; Thomson 1996; Thomson and The Hegeler Institute 1976; Woollard 2015).

Our relationalist account of the moral significance of use says that one individual's use of another suffices to establish a morally significant relationship and thus affects the obligations of the user (as well as the usee). When one individual A uses another individual B, then A and B together become a unit that acts in pursuit of whatever purpose A is using B to pursue, and this means that A and B together become a group agent, or so we will argue. This group agent is a collective in our sense (specifically, it has reasons for action; we argue in the book that all group agents are collectives but not all collectives are group agents). The formation of this type of collective is the mechanism by which use produces a relationship on our account. We argue on the basis of these views that use is not intrinsically wrong, even though use can change our obligations in such a way as to problematize actions that would otherwise be morally innocuous

(Streiffer and Killoren 2019; Killoren and Streiffer 2020). (Our account of the moral significance of use is introduced in this chapter, but is developed in much more detail later in Part II.)

Relationalism's account of conflict among moral obligations is as follows. Moral obligations come into conflict for some individual agent A in two sorts of cases. First, it might be that a single collective produces conflicting obligations for A. For example, suppose A is part of a family: A is the mother of two children, B1 and B2. Then it may be that A, as B1's mother, has an obligation to B1 that conflicts with a different obligation that A has to B2 as B2's mother (as in the tragic story of Sophie's Choice). Call this an *intra-collective deontic conflict*.

Second, it might be that A is a member of two different collectives, and these collectives produce different obligations for A. For example, perhaps A is part of a family but is also a part of a nation, and A has conflicting obligations stemming from her role in these two different collectives (as in Sartre's famous example of a student deciding whether to stay home and care for a parent or fight in a war). Call this an *inter-collective deontic conflict*.

We'll argue that these distinctions between different forms of moral conflict allow relationalism to provide the basis of a textured and intuitively attractive view of how agents should consider and navigate moral conflicts. We are particularly keen to argue that the relationalist account of such conflicts is fuller and more explanatory than widely discussed accounts given by ethical pluralists such as W.D. Ross. Ross famously holds that conflicts among prima facie duties can be resolved only through careful reflection—and he provides no useful guidance about how to proceed when engaging in such reflection. When it comes to questions about how to handle these sorts of conflicts, we'll argue that our view allows us to offer quite a bit more practical guidance than Ross. Yet our view also has one of the key advantages of Ross's view: Our view, like Ross's view, and unlike utilitarianism, does not imply

that moral conflicts can be easily resolved by purely mechanical application of a principle; our view preserves the possibility that finding a resolution in cases of moral conflict requires a form of reflection that is not fully guided by any principles and that can be extremely difficult and even agonizing.

Part II: Relationalist Approaches in Animal Ethics

Part II puts relationalism to work, deploying a relationalist methodology to grapple with some of the thorniest questions in animal ethics. One of the important features of this methodology derives from $O=R+R(I)$ —the principle according to which our moral obligations to others are a function of their interests together with our relationships with them. This principle suggests that when addressing any given moral issue, it will often be useful to start by considering these questions:

- (1) Which individuals have interests at stake in the issue at hand?
- (2) What interests do those individuals have at stake in the issue at hand?
- (3) What are the agent's relationships with the individuals identified in (1)?
- (4) How do those relationships affect the agent's obligations to those individuals in light of the interests identified in (2)?

Given $O=R+R(I)$, if someone has no interests in a given case, then the agent cannot violate any moral obligations to them in that case. This means that our answers to (1) will help to simplify our investigations of moral issues: Anyone whose interests are not at stake in a given issue can be excluded from consideration for the purposes of that issue. (Of course, it's not usually a trivial matter to make a complete list of everyone whose interests are at stake; but it is

often the case that we can easily identify *some* individuals who belong on such a list and some who clearly don't.)

This feature of relationalism puts it into alignment with one of the most attractive features of utilitarianism. Utilitarians say that interests are of paramount importance in ethics and that our obligations to others centrally concern their interests. This allows utilitarians to dramatically narrow and focus their efforts in ethical reasoning. And it allows utilitarians to deny that we should be concerned about moral rules for their own sake; the utilitarian view is that rules can be broken whenever doing so does not affect anyone's interests. Relationalists can concur with these intuitively attractive ideas.

Relationalism's key departure from utilitarianism, of course, is to claim that relationships matter as much as interests do. Here relationalism comports with common sense to a significantly greater degree than utilitarianism. Returning now to an example mentioned earlier in this document: Relationalism, unlike utilitarianism, can affirm the common-sensical idea that your obligations to your mother differ from your obligations to your accountant in virtue of the difference in your relationships with those individuals.

Relationalism's focus on interests together with relationships also allows relationalism to do away with some of the most intuitively problematic ideas in the deontological tradition, which further simplifies its methodology relative to other forms of deontology. Consider Frances Kamm's idea that distance is of fundamental moral significance (Kamm 2007). Relationalism rejects this idea; the *mere* fact that one individual is further from another has no bearing on their relationships or their interests, and so is morally irrelevant. And that result fits with common sense. Broadly, whenever it is claimed that a given factor has moral importance, the relationalist will insist that its moral importance must be derivable from some connection to either interests or

relationships or both. In this way, relationalism yields a highly streamlined deontological methodology—a methodology in which there are just two factors that are of fundamental moral importance.

The relationalist methodology we deploy throughout Part II is often heavily analogical. To illustrate this aspect of our approach, consider a shepherd's moral obligations to her flock of sheep. What sort of veterinary care is she obligated to provide for them? Can she permissibly sell them for slaughter? Can she permissibly use them for wool?

For the relationalist, the foregoing questions are answerable in terms of a deeper question: What does the shepherd's relationship with the sheep require her to do for the sheep? Perhaps the answer to that question does not announce itself, even after some reflection. Then, in order to address the question, we may be able to compare the shepherd's relationship with the sheep to other relationships whose moral dimensions are (we think) better understood.

For example, it might be thought that the relationship between a shepherd and her flock is similar to the relationship between a priest and his congregation; and we might think that we have a pretty good prior understanding of a priest's obligations to his congregation. If so, then a comparison with the case of the priest can help to shed light on the shepherd's moral situation.

In general, whenever we are reasoning analogically, we need some way of identifying relevant similarities (since, after all, most similarities are irrelevant). Fortunately, relationalism supplies a way of doing that. The Collectivity Theory of Relationships and the Role Theory of Obligations together imply that any two relationships R_1 and R_2 differ in morally important respects only if there is a difference in terms of *either* (i) the collectives in which those relationships are situated, or (ii) the roles that the relevant individuals have in the relevant collectives. So, for example, in the shepherd case, we can rely on the analogy with the priest if

we can convincingly argue that the priest-congregation relationship is similar to the shepherd-flock relationship in those two respects. In this way, relationalism provides us with a way to determine whether and how any two relationships are morally comparable. This sort of analogical reasoning is a major feature of our approach throughout Part II.

Chapter 4: The Moral Dilemmas of Animal Research

Opponents and defenders of animal research have something in common: Both sides tend to think it's easy to reach the right verdict on animal research. Opponents often claim that animal research is extremely harmful to animals and not significantly beneficial to humans, so obviously ought to be discontinued; defenders often claim that animal research is extremely beneficial to humans and not significantly harmful to animals, so obviously ought to be continued. However, both sides are mistaken. Animal research is in many cases both extremely harmful to animals and extremely beneficial to humans.

Consider a historically important case. In 1822, François Magendie performed a horrific experiment on young puppies. He surgically exposed the roots of their peripheral nerves which, conveniently for him, could be separated from each other outside of the spinal column. He then cut the dorsal root of nerves in some puppies and the ventral roots of nerves in others. He observed that the puppies in which he had severed the dorsal roots could move but could no longer feel the corresponding part of their body. In puppies in which he had severed the ventral roots, the puppies could no longer move but could feel the corresponding part of their body. He thus established that the dorsal roots are responsible for primarily carrying sensory signals from the body to the brain whereas the ventral roots are primarily responsible for carrying motor

signals from the brain to the body.¹³ This was almost certainly excruciatingly painful, given that the first anesthetic, ether, had not yet been introduced; even Magendie's defenders have described the pain as "intense" and "hideous" (Gallistel 1981, 358, 359; French 1975, 20). Yet this research is one of the most important in the history of biology, and provided the foundation for modern neurophysiology, which has saved and enhanced countless human lives.

At the outset of this chapter we consider a range of historical and modern examples of animal research and argue that in a great many cases, including cases from very recent years, animal research is both extremely harmful to animals and extremely beneficial to humans. Our purpose in this chapter is to show that relationalism can help make some progress on the difficult question of how to deal with such dilemmas.

Baruch Brody defends animal research by appealing to the idea that discounting the interests of animals harmed in research is justified because of human scientists' relationships to their fellow human beings and by the interests of many human beings in scientific achievements made possible by harmful animal research; but Brody's idea remains radically undeveloped (Brody 2001, 145–46); cf. (Rossi 2013, 64)). Some research using animals is intended not to benefit humans, but rather, other animals. Brody's proposal seems to do no work at all explaining how such research could be justified. And even focusing on animal research for human benefit, do scientists really have relationships with *all* of the humans who stand to benefit from their research? If so, what sorts of relationships are they? Further, Brody seems to assume that human-human relationships are all that matter in this context. But it is undeniable, on reflection, that scientists have relationships with the animals confined in their laboratories. Any

¹³ (Magendie 1822). See (Cranefield 1974) for a comprehensive history.

relationalist approach in animal ethics cannot myopically focus on human-human relationships without even considering human-animal relationships.

A main purpose of this chapter is to provide careful characterizations of two sorts of relationships: the relationships of research scientists to the animals in their experiments, and the relationships of research scientists to the human beings who stand to benefit from their experiments. These relationships are in many ways very different from each other. The relationship of a scientist with her research subjects is often quite intimate, whereas the relationship of a scientist with the humans who benefit from her research typically lacks such intimacy (indeed, many of the beneficiaries will not even have been born yet). Also, scientists are involved in use relationships with their subjects, and are often responsible for their subjects' existence (given that animals are routinely bred for use in experiments). By contrast it does not seem that scientists use the beneficiaries of their research and usually are not creators of those beneficiaries.

Further, although the relationship between scientists and beneficiaries of science is sometimes a political one (scientists' fellow citizens benefit from their research), it isn't always; the benefits of science flow easily across national boundaries. In many cases the only thing that scientists and beneficiaries of science have in common is that they are all human beings. One of our major questions in this chapter is whether shared humanity can be the basis of a morally significant relationship.

Our position is that many scientists engaged in animal research are in a dilemmatic situation: scientists have a moral obligation to protect and care for their animal subjects; yet scientists also have a moral obligation to pursue promising lines of research that can benefit their fellow humans even in cases where doing so is extremely harmful to their animal subjects. This

is what we call an *inter-collective conflict* (see Chapter 3 above). We do not offer easy answers about how to navigate these conflicts, but we hope that our work in this chapter helps to take a few steps in the direction of such answers. Much of our discussion here proceeds via the analogical methodology described above. We are attentive to ways in which research scientists' relationships with their beneficiaries and with their animal research subjects resemble or differ from other relationships whose moral dimensions are (we feel) better understood. For example, given that (as we've noted) scientists often breed animals for use in experiments, we explore ways in which their relationships with animals resemble or differ from various creator-creature relationships such as parent-child relationships.

The purpose of this chapter is not only to further our understanding of the ethics of scientific research on animals; it's also to rely on the case studies discussed in this chapter to show why relationalism is a plausible and resourceful moral theory. Relationalism, we'll show, implies that some animal research is morally wrong even though it does more good for humans than harm to animals—a departure from utilitarianism. Yet relationalism also implies that some animal research is morally right, in virtue of its benefits for humans, even though it is harmful to animals in ways that are prohibited by standard rights theories in animal ethics. In fact, relationalism even provides a basis for defense of some hypothetical forms of animal research that would be forbidden from *both* the utilitarian perspective *and* the standard rights theorists' perspective. In these ways, we show, relationalism departs from the major traditions within animal ethics, but does so in ways that enhance rather than diminish its intuitive appeal.

Chapter 5: The Tragic Ethics of Human-Animal Companionship

Each evening after work, you see your coworker Sara trudging along the road to get home, but because you do not know her well, you feel no obligation to offer her a ride in your car. But if you were to befriend her, then you might then feel such an obligation. So, if you value after-work time spent alone in your car, you might be hesitant to befriend her.

In general, we are often reluctant to form close relationships with others when we foresee that the obligations that would come with such relationships would be inconvenient or otherwise undesirable. There can also be reason to refrain from forming close relationships when doing so will give rise to new obligations that will predictably go unfulfilled. The purpose of this chapter is to explore a particularly acute version of this dynamic as it arises with respect to the type of relationship that can exist between a human and a companion animal (“pet”).

We argue, first, that when you adopt an animal, thus turning that animal into a companion, you thereby acquire weighty and demanding moral obligations to the animal: for example, depending on the animal’s species and other individual characteristics, you’re typically obligated to provide food, shelter, social interaction, exercise, a high standard of veterinary care, and so on. And in many cases, fulfillment of these obligations may require you to spend a great deal of time and money. For example, we contend that many people with dogs as companion animals are obligated to spend tens of thousands of dollars over the lifespan of their dog. We also address from a relationalist perspective some of the ethical issues arising from pet euthanasia, one unfortunately common way to end a relationship with an animal.

The weightiness and demandingness of our moral obligations to companion animals leads to a kind of tragedy, we wish to argue. These obligations 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 in shelters and pounds from being 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.

Our main argument for the view that humans' obligations to their animal companions are very weighty and demanding derives from analogy with adoptive parenthood in humans. After presenting this argument we consider a number of objections to our view.

First, it might be objected that morality simply cannot be tragic in the way we argue that it is. On this view, either our obligations to non-companion animals are very demanding, or our obligations to companion animals are *not* very demanding; but in any case the formation of an interspecies companionship cannot induce such a radical change in the demandingness of our obligations. And there cannot be such a radical change because if there were, it would mean that morality is structured in such a way that it is *needlessly harmful* to the interests of a whole class of innocent beings, namely animals. It might be thought that morality simply cannot be needlessly harmful in this way.

Second, there is an objection from cultural variation. Here we want to examine street animals in modern-day Istanbul, where animals—especially dogs and cats—are often befriended by humans without being treated as pets and without being given the sort of special treatment that pets are often given elsewhere. So, for example, a shopkeeper in Istanbul might befriend a dog by feeding her regularly and allowing her into her shop during the day but without providing her with veterinary care or shelter during cold nights. Our account might seem to imply that such a shopkeeper is in the wrong; more broadly, our account might seem to imply that the entire city

of Istanbul is engaged in immoral behavior toward animals there. But such an implication is objectionable. We think our view has to make room for the highly plausible view that Istanbul's way of interacting with street animals is morally acceptable and even laudable. To make our case here, we argue that the nature of individuals' relationships can be affected by the culture in which their relationships occur, with the result that the moral significance of one's relationships can be to some degree culturally dependent. This, in turn, allows us to put the spotlight on an advantage of relationalism: this theory can explain why cultural variations often seem capable of affecting the content of our obligations, and can do so *without* having to resort to metaphysically dubious views (such as cultural relativism).

After addressing objections to our view and making the case for our view that moral reality is indeed tragic in the ways we've argued, we draw some general lessons from our discussion for the moral dimensions of relationships. Here we want to argue that even though forming a companionship with an animal can lead one to wrong that animal later on (if, e.g., one is unwilling to pay for veterinary care for that animal), this does not mean that the act of forming the companionship is itself wrong. For there is no general principle according to which any action that leads to wrong actions must itself be wrong. In fact, we want to argue that there may be many cases where there is a moral obligation to form a relationship (such as a companionship or parental relationships) even when it is foreseeable that forming that relationship will lead to obligations being violated.

Chapter 6: The Use Relationship

One of the main themes of our discussion in Chapter 4 is that using someone forms a relationship with them that can dramatically affect the obligations of the user to the usee. This raises a further

question: What is it to use someone? This chapter examines this question during the course of discussing a range of problem cases. One of the main upshots of our discussion is that using others might be quite a bit more widespread than is commonly believed.

It seems plausible that the following claims are true:

(1) *Animal experimentation*: When a scientist performs an experiment on a rat in order to advance scientific knowledge, she thereby uses the rat.

(2) *Pest control*: When a homeowner poisons a rat in order to prevent the rat from occupying her home, she does not thereby use the rat.

Why does use occurs in (1) but not in (2)? In (1), the scientist has a certain goal—to attain scientific knowledge—and the rat is involved directly in the scientist’s serving that goal, such that if the rat were removed (and not replaced by a different rat) then the scientist would not be able to achieve her goal. By contrast, in (2), the homeowner’s goal—to have a rat-free home—can be achieved without the rat. Indeed, the rat is only an impediment to the homeowner’s goal, which is why the homeowner is poisoning the rat. Thus, perhaps the difference between (1) and (2) can be explained by a certain condition on use:

Presence Requirement: An agent A uses an individual I only when I’s involvement is needed in order to achieve A’s goal.

But the Presence Requirement has many counterexamples ((Killoren, n.d.)). Consider:

Bad Roommate: You have a large can full of garbage. To get rid of the garbage, you turn the can over onto your sleeping roommate. The garbage ends up being strewn all over his body and all around him on his bed and on the floor.

In this case, it seems plausible to say that you are using your roommate—specifically, you are using him as a dumping ground for your garbage—but your roommate’s involvement is not

needed in order to achieve your goal in this case (the goal of getting rid of the garbage). After making a case against the Presence Requirement we argue that it is difficult to find any difference whatsoever between (1) and (2) that could explain why use occurs in one case but not the other.

In a similar vein we also consider another pair of claims:

(3) *Hunting*: When a hunter kills an animal in order to eat that animal, the hunter uses the animal.

(4) *Eating animals*: When a grocery shopper purchases meat in order to eat it and thereby causes (through mechanisms of supply and demand) a future animal to exist, suffer, and die, the shopper does *not* thereby use that future animal.

Here again it can be asked why use occurs in (3) but not in (4). Here's a possible response:

Counterfactual Requirement: An agent A uses an individual I only when A's action has an effect E such that (i) E affects I and (ii) the goal of A's action would not be achieved if A's action did not cause E.

The Counterfactual Requirement is satisfied in (3) but not in (4): If the hunter had failed to kill the animal then the hunter would not have been able to achieve her goal of eating; but if the grocery shopper's action had failed to result in a future animal, the grocery shopper would still have been able to eat. However, we show that the Counterfactual Requirement, like the Presence Requirement, has intuitively unattractive implications when applied in certain cases. More strongly, we argue that if use occurs in (3), then use occurs in (4) as well. These points suggest that whatever the correct notion of use turns out to be, it will be quite a lot more expansive than traditional philosophers' notions. This means that use relationships with others are much more widespread than many believe.

These considerations have implications for traditional deontological views about the moral significance of use. Consider the Doctrine of Double Effect (DDE).

DDE's central commitment that there is a morally important difference between harmfully using someone as a means to an end and harming them as a mere side effect. DDE has been recruited to explain a wide range of familiar deontological judgments. For example, deontologists typically want to say that it is wrong to kill the one to save the five in the footbridge trolley case but permissible to kill the one to save the five in the standard switch trolley case, and many DDE defenders want to use DDE to explain these divergent judgments (Otsuka (2008)). Broadly, many defenders of DDE want to rely on DDE-style reasoning to support a wide range of moral discriminations in diverse contexts such as war (where bombing in order to kill N civilians is seen as morally different from bombing with the foreknowledge that N civilians will be killed), medicine, tax policy, etc.

However, our arguments in this chapter suggest that use is far too widespread for DDE to be useful in making such deontological moral discriminations. For example, our arguments suggest that use occurs in both the footbridge trolley case and in the standard switch trolley case, and so DDE cannot be recruited to explain the moral difference between these cases. We argue that a relationalist view according to which different sorts of use establish different sorts of relationships and thus have different sorts of moral significance is superior to DDE in enabling us to make the sorts of moral discriminations that deontologists want to make. We then argue that the resulting view has many substantive and in some cases surprising implications in animal ethics. For instance, we argue on the basis of this view that experimentation on animals is morally similar to pest removal and that hunting animals is morally similar to purchasing meat at the grocery store.

One of the takeaways from our discussion of use is that use is extremely widespread; and use of one individual by another is sufficient to establish the existence of some sort of relationship between those individuals; therefore, relationships are extremely widespread. Indeed, we think it is arguable that almost everyone has some sort of relationship with almost everyone. This raises the question of whether anyone is a moral stranger to anyone (recall: two individuals are moral strangers if there is no relationship between them). The next chapter provides an occasion for investigation of this question.

Chapter 7: Wild Animals and the Possibility of Moral Strangers

There is currently a very active and growing literature in philosophical ethics on questions about human responsibilities to intervene in nature to address wild animal suffering (Horta 2017a; Delon and Purves 2018; Johannsen forthcoming). We conclude the book by considering ways in which relationalism can contribute to this debate.

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 moral strangers to one another—and therefore they have no obligations to each other. That does not mean that B's interests do not provide A with reasons for action (nor vice-versa). If A is in a position to help B to avoid some threat, for instance, then A has reasons to do so, according to relationalism, even though these reasons absent a relationship cannot generate an obligation owed to B. Further, A might even have a moral obligation to help B in such a case; but it cannot be a *directed* obligation, i.e., an obligation *to* B. Relationalism is a theory of directed obligations; it is silent about whether any undirected obligations exist.

Are wild animals moral strangers to us? Apart from a handful of stories of humans raised by wolves or chimps, wild animals do not usually have *familial* relationships with human beings, and it may initially be unclear what other types of relationships they might have with us. Nevertheless, we maintain that wild animals can and often do form meaningful relationships with human beings. We consider two cases in some detail: the case of bird-watching, which we argue involves a particularly removed and unobtrusive form of use of wild birds by humans; and the case of conservation of wilderness areas, which we argue (drawing from our past work on the ethics of animal confinement) also involves a form of use of the wild animals who live in the areas being conserved (Streiffer and Killoren 2019). In each of these cases, we maintain, morally significant relationships exist between humans and wild animals.

So our position is that humans and wild animals often have morally significant relationships to one another and that these relationships in many cases provide the basis of a morally weighty duty to aid. We 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). In fact, we maintain—against the views of utilitarian philosophers who have staked out views on wild animal suffering—that humans may be obligated to intervene to protect animals in conservation areas even in some cases where doing so would do more harm than good. In the course of our discussion we find ourselves in agreement with many aspects of Clare Palmer’s (2010) views on these topics, though our reasoning differs from hers.

After making these arguments, we turn to a more difficult question: Are there *any* wild animals with whom we have no relationships whatsoever? The answer to this question depends in significant part on certain difficult questions about collective rationality. A collective, recall, is

a group of individuals that has reasons for action. There is debate about what sorts of organizations of individuals can allow for the possession of such reasons. On some strict views, a group must have an efficacious decision procedure in order to have reasons. On such views, corporations, sports teams, nations, and married couples can count as collectives; but unstructured groups of individuals that lack an efficacious decision procedure, such as the group of all individuals on Earth, cannot count as collectives. If one defends such a strict view, as many philosophers in the social ontology literature do, then it seems plausible that we do not have relationships with a great many wild animals. For example, we plausibly have no relationships with wild wolves in remote parts of Siberia where there are no human settlements or human activity. However, drawing on prior work by Killoren and Williams (2013), we argue that there are many unstructured groups that lack efficacious decision procedures yet have reasons for action. And this, we argue, makes room for the speculative idea that everyone in the world has some sort of relationship to everyone else. We conclude our discussion in this chapter by assessing the costs and benefits of this speculative idea, neither affirming it nor rejecting it, and then teasing out its implications for our moral obligations to wild animals.

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