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Virtue Ethics and Non-Human Animals: The Missing Link to the Animal Liberation Movement

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Abstract

In this thesis, I will be arguing for a more balanced assessment for the protection and treatment of non-human animals while expanding our moral concern to include them. Currently, arguments for what has been coined 'the animal liberation movement' center around the act of the person toward the animal, yet the character of the person is neither questioned nor examined. It is through this concentration that the movement, and ultimately the animals, suffers. Classical virtue ethics fills in the gaps left by utilitarianism and deontology by shifting some of the attention away from the outcome to the source. Essentially, in order for positive change in the treatment, views, and protection of animals to occur more rapidly and thoroughly, we should begin focusing on curing the disease and not simply the symptoms. I will set an alternative approach to the movement by including virtue ethics, and from this inclusion will begin looking to the cycle of persons receiving their initial traits from role models and laws. By encouraging more emphasis on and bringing attention to what it means to be a virtuous person towards animals, a paradigm shift will gradually occur to include concern for animals in laws, parenting, and socially accepted beliefs and actions. It is within these structures we will find the biggest support in favor of animals and their treatment.

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Senior Thesis

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Introduction

While the topic of non-human animals¹ and morality has been a heated debate over the last several decades, in the United States there is still a deep-seated anthropocentrism – human-centered – ideology throughout most of the population. No longer is it that many humans believe in the Cartesian view of animals being thoughtless or emotionless much like that of a clock of machine-like qualities (Armstrong, 1993), but rather the paradigm shift has been towards the belief of human needs coming before animal needs in all situations.

Scholars, however, have made progress in detailing why the idea behind anthropocentrism is not true or ethical, with books like Peter Singer's "Animal Liberation" and Tom Regan's "The Case for Animal Rights." These books, and others, have continued making progress which some deem as radical changes in the way humans think about and respond to animals, their morality, and our treatment of them. These arguments, and the hundreds that followed, were what many humans – from activists to those simply questioning their beliefs on the topic – were waiting for: a logical, thoughtful explanation of why animals matter and why the actions humans, as moral agents, do towards them matter.

Still, despite these arguments' obvious contribution to how many now examine the topic of animal liberation, something is missing. Singer's arguments rely on utilitarianism and Regan's on deontology – both action-focused ethical theories – and while the outcome of actions matters hugely to animals and their protections, the actual morality of the person performing such actions has remained rarely discussed. For this, virtue ethics should be implemented among these theories and, for there to be a more progressive shift in the way

¹ I will now refer to 'non-human animals' as 'animals' for the sake of brevity. When I refer to animals, I am excluding human beings despite their belonging to such a category.

humans view animals, we must concentrate on the virtues and character of the humans within a society rather than simply on their actions. It is imperative to give a greater focus now to revising laws, revisiting virtues concerning animals, and addressing inconsistencies in our approach towards animals.

Overview

I will be arguing that the animal liberation movement is missing a key factor in its implementation and effectiveness: virtues and character traits must move beyond only acting morally neutral or inconsistent towards animals and instead should shift these virtues into their consistency, thus including animals in moral value. I will be using “moral value” on the same grounds as moral consideration – moral value, when given, constitutes someone worthy of being considered in morally important decisions/actions. In other words, in saying non-human animals have moral value, I am asserting arguments have shown animals possess sufficient qualities to be deserving of moral consideration and are receivers of such consideration. Using classical virtue ethics as a foundation to build on, I will establish that our virtues help determine much of our actions, often left out of utilitarian or deontological argument, which the progression of positive change for animals relies on. Once this is established, I will move to the implementation of such virtues and character building. Virtue ethics depends heavily on how we come to know morally significant virtues – relying on role models, examining others’ actions, and, “following certain rules.” (Annas, 2003) I will further define what this reliance means and why continually checking for inconsistencies in our beliefs and behavior is a necessary condition of being a virtuous person. I will then concentrate on role modeling behavior being dependent upon actual virtuous, or moral,

persons to then teach others by example. Through this role modeling behavior, I will specifically turn attention to the rules portion of virtue ethics. Rules, or how I will be interpreting them for the animal liberation movement, laws, teach us early on what is deemed okay and not okay – often with moral undertones, such as the prevalent thought of virtue jurisprudence. It is from these laws we begin gauging what is important – such as honesty, compassion, or justice – which we slowly define throughout our lifetime. For the treatment of animals to be improved upon with lasting change and equality, the argument for what is considered virtuous must expand to animals.

Theoretical Foundation

The age-old question of “How should I live my life?” has been well addressed in philosophy and other disciplines across the board. The question is essential to both self-interest and interest in others, including animals. Many would agree that one should live in correspondence with being a good person in the best way possible, but what does being a good person entail and how should it affect others? Virtue ethics, specifically classical virtue ethics, approaches this question with a reliance on virtues and vices. A virtue is “a good, or admirable, or praiseworthy character trait” whereas a vice is “a bad, or despicable or unpraiseworthy character trait” (Hursthouse (2), 147).

In directing the asker to an answer for their question of how to live, virtue ethics looks to the idea of the “virtuous person.” A virtuous person is someone who has, and exercises, those character traits we collectively grant praise and admiration towards – generosity, honesty, compassion, kindness, trustworthiness etc. It is not enough to simply act on what is seen to be virtuous without intent, but rather to be a virtuous person whole heartedly; the

virtuous character trait should resonate in all aspects of the person's character. In this way, virtue ethics is agent-based (as opposed to action-based, such as with utilitarianism which does not necessarily care about the intent of the agent doing the action, but rather only with the action and outcome itself) and this it focuses on, among other things, how "the unity of character is extremely labyrinthine. It couples systematically a person's values, choices, desires, strength or weakness of will, emotions, feelings, perceptions, interests, expectations, and sensibilities" (Hursthouse, 12). For example, if someone is an honest person, one must not simply refrain from telling a lie but one would also refrain from being involved in lies, would admire those who tell the truth and look down on those who lie, would go out of their way to make the truth known (even if the lie is in their favor), etc. Once these virtues are acquired, they are embedded within the person yet will need ongoing nurturing (such as societal nurturing) to be sustained (Hursthouse, 12). But where do we acquire such virtues? Through role models, teachers, and rules (laws) (Annas, 2003) we acquire at minimum a set standard of what is and isn't virtuous and how these virtues are applied morally. It is then we begin to think more for ourselves and we deepen our commitment to certain virtues – maybe one person really values honesty and justice – so we are able to make these virtues consistent in both our thoughts and our actions.

A definitive list of traits for both virtues and vices is not necessary since, as is found to be the case, recognizing these sorts of traits is of common-sense practicality. We observe and judge traits others have and compartmentalize them accordingly – are they virtues, vices, or do they remain neutral? Virtue ethics, derived from the work of Aristotle, focuses on eudaimonia – or flourishing of life – for the principle of what we are aiming for in our character and in our actions. Essentially, it could readily be agreed upon without much

assumption that the goal of living a 'good life' is to reach true happiness and to flourish in aspects of the self. This "flourishing" criterion *could* be used as a standard to classify these traits. Currently, however, this flourishing through behavior is stunted or, as Hursthouse denotes it, there are "imperfect degrees of virtues" (Hursthouse, 14) partly because most of our virtues do not translate into moral consideration for all animals with sentience. If someone were to murder someone (a human), outside of self-defense, our intuition, associated with the act of flourishing, tells us that this person acted under a vice trait and is not leading a life towards eudaimonia. However, people consistently murder non-human animals and, depending on the exceptions in our culture with domesticated animals, this act is not seen as a vice and the person's eudaimonia is rarely viewed as being affected.

I draw this parallel between how one responds to the killing of a human compared to the killing of an animal to help facilitate that currently, we are a people who have a lackluster response to how most animals are treated in terms of how we are to live as a moral being. Those typically deemed "virtuous people" are, more often than not, people who practice daily harms to animals, whether this is the foods they choose to eat and the products they choose to buy or their general feeling of an animal suffering. Despite these choices, they are still judged as virtuous if their character traits line up with what is good for themselves and other humans. Virtue ethics does look to indirect actions and non-actions as similarly situated as direct actions. It is not enough to simply refrain from directly participating in cruelty, such as being the individual who skins a fox alive for their fur; one must not be party to such actions indirectly, such as purchasing the fur, or knowingly choosing to remain ignorant or inactive, such as witnessing the skinning but doing nothing to prevent it. Simply put, "There is a large gap between not being cruel and being truly compassionate..." (Hursthouse, 2006) and it is

the truly compassionate (or the truly honest, the truly loyal, etc.) which constitutes a virtuous person.

Hursthouse and others describe an “imperfect virtuous agent” as someone who has yet to reach the plateau of being a virtuous person despite having some characteristics associated with being one. The imperfect virtuous agent is still learning what it means to be a virtuous person; they are still susceptible to making wrong decisions and having vices. For example, someone who is rather honest in her life pays for an item and receives more money in return than what was her due change. The “imperfect virtuous agent” would still wrestle with the debate between upholding her honest virtue by returning the money and the temptation to selfishly gain from the mistake – the priority of honesty being a true virtue has yet to be established in a way in which it is whole heartedly met. It is this conception of how virtues should be applied which I will later expand on as “incomplete” virtues in the realm of our treatment of and feelings towards animals, specifically examining compassionate behavior.

Of course a “perfect person” may only exist in theory, but classical virtue ethics focuses on more of a holistic approach rather than nit-picking each trait a person may or may not have. With that said, I do not contend that a completely or perfectly virtuous person is possible in saying most people are “imperfect” or “incomplete.” This is not the dichotomy I am making, but rather I am stating there are incomplete aspects of virtues preexisting because they do not address animals. As Joel Kupperman states in his discussion of virtues, “human beings have character without (a) believing in human perfection, or (b) thinking that character is static” and he furthers this by adding the “stipulation of human perfection does not suggest then that peoples’ characters do not differ sharply” (Kupperman, 2009; 244). I mention this because there is an important difference to be made. I am not treating “imperfect” or

“incomplete” in terms of their needing their opposites, such as an “imperfect person” existing because of a “perfect person” existing, but rather I am treating this terminology as missing something – animal moral consideration – and this ‘missing’ component is the ‘incomplete’ component.

Objections to Virtue Ethics

One of the biggest objections to virtue ethics is one I would like to resolve early on. This is the objection of agent-centered versus action-centered concerns. Many scholars look at virtue ethics as being a guideline of the type of person someone should be (agent-centered, such as “What type of person should I be?”) but criticizes that virtue ethics does not give guidance as to the type of actions someone should take to be such a person (action-centered, such as “What actions should I take to be such a person?”). This has led into virtue ethics being accused of “Being rather than Doing” (Hursthouse, 25) which gives us no instruction on how one should live, thus being useless in ethical application. Since virtue ethics is focused on the virtues of a person and not necessarily the outcome of the actions that person takes, its objectors often view virtue ethics as a supplement to deontology and utilitarianism; practical to be added into discussion of other ethical theories but not substantial enough to hold its own due to its failure to provide action guidance, such as rules or principles that focus on the action itself.

This objection, however, seems to be misunderstanding virtue ethics’ premise of deploying specifications of right action (action-centered) by using an agent (virtuous person). Before I proceed, I must note that I am not using ‘right action’ here as it is usually used (in terms of ‘right’ and ‘wrong’) but rather, I use Hursthouse’s definition of right action “in the

sense of a good or excellent action, one that gets a tick of approval, and ‘wrong’ as a bad or vicious action” (Zyl, 2011) because it more accurately follows virtue ethics. In understanding the actions a virtuous person would take by possessing such virtuosic characteristics, we can begin to see how virtue ethics uses a list of traits to follow as one would define ‘right action’ (Hursthouse, 19). It is with these ‘catalogues’ of traits one would come to define a virtuous person under a set of guidelines in how to live, while this person later becomes a role model for others. While this list is an abstract idea, not defined in full detail as a finite list, it is harbored in similarities between what is deemed praiseworthy and what is deemed unfavorable, something we must begin to expand to animals of all species now that solid arguments have been made for their moral value.

Furthermore, there lies a distinction between explanatory accounts and substantive accounts of right action. Here, explanatory accounts of right action would look to an explanation of what *makes* an action right and substantive accounts of right action would look to what these right actions all have in common. Much assumption is placed on virtue ethics answering both of these questions, but instead virtue ethics focuses on substantive accounts of right action only; it acts as a practical guide to allow us to recognize a right action: it does not claim that an action is right *because* a virtuous person performed it but rather that a virtuous person *would* perform such an action. (Zyl, 2011)

So, although virtue ethics remains agent-centered in its foundation, it is as capable of presenting actions one should take – answering the question “How should I live?” – and determining the consequences of such actions as other theories do: either being a virtuous or a non-virtuous person. The virtuous person is thus exemplary of how one should act and is, thus, the action guidance for virtue ethics. This exemplar behavior also stems from not only

individuals but from our moral education, such as rules/laws, which I will examine at length later.

It should be noted, due to the explanation of this distinction, that there is another distinction to be made within substantive accounts of right actions: action guidance and action assessment. This distinction, albeit a trivial one, serves the purpose of helping someone understand what was right and what was wrong. However, this leads us into another objection. It seems virtue ethics would run into problems with both the virtues themselves coming into conflict and the available actions someone has available to them. This objection, therefore, is twofold.

First, if one is to do what a virtuous person would characteristically do, what is someone supposed to do in situations which offer no right outcome? Other ethical theories solve this through their rules or principles of action guidance – either you perform the action which will maximize happiness/minimize pain or you perform the action which will not infringe upon someone's moral rights and follows a rule-set. These outcomes, then, are right action. Virtue ethics, however, does not have this equipped within its framework; if one is to do what a virtuous person would do but no options allow for such behavior, action guidance is completely severed. For example, let us take the original trolley problem introduced by Philippa Foot which involves an evil madman who tied four people to one side of a train track and one person to the other side. He then puts you in control, forcing you to decide whether to either pull a train-track lever resulting in the death of the one individual but saving the four, or not pulling the lever and having the four die but not killing the one as passivity (with all individuals being equal). (Owens, 2004) The utilitarian would pull the lever to save the four from death, resulting in the killing of one. Deontologists would take the passive approach

under the rule of “One should not kill” and would not pull the lever, saving one while the other four die as a result of inaction. What would a virtue ethicist do? It is unclear.

Before I respond, I wish to make a quick side-step, for this objection seems very prevalent to my argument of including animals in our decisions of which actions we should take in order to be a virtuous person leading a flourishing life. There are many instances in which human and animal interest conflict with each other and decisions must be made. Let’s say instead of a mad man tying individual humans to train tracks, the mad man tied four dogs (or pigs, or gorillas, or sheep) to one side of a train track and one human to the other side. Does this change any of the decisions other ethical theories would make? It would depend heavily on the type of approach the ethical theory takes (such as whether a utilitarian considers humans and animals as equal or takes into consideration relationship connections they may have) but it need not matter in this discussion. What matters is how a virtue ethicist would respond. Is it still unclear as before or has it changed? I argue, while it is not as unclear as some may think (which I will shortly address), it should not change. However, the current standard of what being a virtuous person is seems to say a different story, following ‘incomplete virtues.’ While I remain aware that human individuals may have more awareness of what is happening to them (such as impending death), or could happen, to them and they typically have stronger ties to other individuals, I contend the humans’ and animals’ moral value should be considered in the same way for the sake of being a virtuous person, which I will shortly discuss in further detail.

Following this example of whether one should kill four animals to save one human, we can expand the virtue of benevolence. Under, what could be described as, currently accepted social norms in the United States, it would be viewed as right action to kill the four

animals to save the one human. This leads us back to the anthropocentric view of humans coming before animals in times of conflict (from humans' food customs coming before an animal's life to direct death-or-death situations like the revised trolley problem). Again, it is here which I argue that this is actually not benevolent in virtue to simply assert hierarchy over animals by killing four to save one. This is especially wrong since it, unlike the deontologist position of non-action which involves not switching the lever, involves direct action of switching the lever over to save the one human individual. If details of the individuals' species were unknown, this active choice of killing four to save one seems illogical and immoral through our basic intuitions so why would one remain benevolent by doing so? I argue they would not. (Zyl, 2011) I am not asserting here that one should kill the one human to save the four dogs definitively, but rather the decision should not be swiftly came to and the outcome, if the four dogs were killed, should stem similar feelings of sadness, regret, etc. as would occur if the individuals killed were human. There should be the same type of tragic dilemma involved as would be if only humans were involved if one was practicing as a more complete virtuous character.

So, going back to the objection at-hand, how would virtue ethicists respond to the original trolley problem? Although there is no definitive answer to go after, it could easily be assumed a virtuous person would do what will continue their ability to live a virtuous life. This problem, however, leads into, what Hursthouse considers a "tragic dilemmas." These are situations which inhibit right action, as defined as "an act that merits praise rather than blame, an act that an agent can take pride in doing rather than feel unhappy about, the sort of act that decent, virtuous agents do and seek out occasions for doing" from occurring. (Hursthouse, 1999) Even if one would do what a "virtuous person would characteristically do," (Ibid)

performing a right action, or in other words feeling happy about or taking pride in – as a virtuous person – the action performed, is thus impossible. It would be figured killing the one to save the four would, more likely than not, be viewed as a more practical action to take but would the person who pulled the lever feel proud of killing the one individual to save the four? I'd argue, assuming they were virtuous, they would not. They would probably, instead, feel quite remorseful for the life lost and would not find happiness in their decision – rather, it was simply something that had to be done. So, in this way, virtue ethics does not give a means as to how to approach these kinds of situations as other ethical theories do, but rather it relies on a more practical approach: situations like this are terrible and there is no morally or virtuously correct action to take, but rather there is one that is more virtuous or correct than another.

The second part of the objection concerns the virtues themselves. Often situations cause conflicting priorities and concerns – virtues are not consistent with one another all of the time. A very common example of this is the virtue of honesty and the virtue of kindness. Telling the truth to someone can cause immense pain to them, which would not be kind but if one is to be honest, one must tell the truth. So a conflict arises between telling the truth and being unkind or being kind but not telling the truth. These conflicts happen more often than not (there almost always seems to be some sort of struggle of doing what a virtuous person would do because both choices have positives and negatives associated with them) and virtue ethics seems to fail to give an appropriate means in which to decide, once again not providing action guidance to someone seeking an answer as to what they should do. Questions then come up regarding whether there are certain virtues that are more important than others or if

there is a way to know which decision is actually the virtuous one or, even, if there is a “more virtuous” decision.

This objection is applied to both virtue ethics and deontology (by replacing virtues with rules) and both theories respond the same; the conflict is merely “apparent” and upon closer examination and more accurate application of the theory, one notices there is a fairly obvious answer as to which decision to make. (Hursthouse, 1999) If we are to go back to the honesty and kindness example, most times telling the truth (even if it initially has unkind results) would be the more virtuous decision because keeping a lie from someone rarely benefits them, especially in the long run. This is not to say some virtues have more importance in their holding, but rather that each situation typically has virtues that are tied into its being. The virtue of honesty is obviously tied into the situation of whether to tell the truth or not; it is essentially asking you whether you will be honest or not. Following this example, other virtues, such as kindness, are indirectly associated to the meaning. If one is a virtuous person, with an understanding of virtues, these types of conflicts will not be seen as conflicts at all.

Why Animals Matter Morally

The moral status of animals has long been argued in philosophy but I wish to only give a brief account of the two most popular, renowned, and modern arguments in favor of animal moral value. I do this to further legitimize my argument insofar that something is missing from these theories, despite their invaluable contribution to the movement. The two theories, deontology and utilitarianism, focus on the outcome of what is occurring to the animal during their lifetime, with little mention of the character traits behind such outcomes.

In his groundbreaking book 'The Case for Animal Rights', Tom Regan gives animal moral value philosophical credibility. Regan argues that animals are "subjects-of-a-life," a term he defines as "a conscious creature having an individual welfare that is important to it even if that welfare is useless to others" (Regan, 144). Due to animals meeting and maintaining the "subject-of-a-life" criteria Regan had laid out, he goes on to say animals have moral rights to life and bodily integrity, among other things, just the same as humans do. Regan, however, does make note that these rights do not foolishly grant animals all rights humans have, such as the right to vote or the right to freedom of speech, but instead it grants those moral rights that apply towards animals' lives. Regan exemplifies this with his *respect principle* which states "We are to treat those individuals who have inherent value in ways that respect their inherent value" (Regan, 248). It is here, for Regan, animals receive their moral value.

Little is noted on the character of the moral agent acting for or against an animal in Regan's work. Rather here Regan is concerned with the animals themselves: subjects-of-a-life are entitled to certain rights and these rights must be granted through duty. It is with such a notion I place virtue ethics as being extremely important to the implementation of such rights. Just as one would presumably argue women having rights, it is up to the moral fiber – or character – of the majority in a society to grant such rights for the rights to actually have an impact on women's lives. We could testify, as Regan does, that animals have basic rights which should be upheld but it is not until the character of the majority granting and upholding these rights – which I argue is necessary for being a virtuous person – will there begin to be drastic improvement in the lives of animals (through their receiving of such rights).

Peter Singer, in his highly acclaimed book ‘Animal Liberation,’ approaches the question of how we are to treat animals through utilitarianism. Singer denies that animals (and humans alike) have moral rights but rather that legal rights exist to minimize suffering. To this extent, humans and animals do not share the same set of rights since “there are obviously important differences between human and other animals, and these differences must give rise to some differences in the rights that each have” (Singer, 2). Instead of focusing on rights and duty for his argument, he focuses on maximizing the greatest good, with each individual receiving equal consideration in the equation.

Singer’s criterion for moral consideration for animals is based on sentience, or their ability to feel pain and pleasure, and he argues against *speciesism*. Speciesism is on-par with racism or sexism – it is the act of discrimination of an individual from a different species than one’s own because of their belonging to a different species. Singer argues that other methods of fitting the moral consideration criteria are speciesist since these other methods of criteria (such as intelligence, rationality, and language which have all been largely argued for) are not uniformly found in every individual of a species. This is true even when that individual is given moral consideration (almost exclusively this hypocrisy is found in our relationships towards other humans, but sometimes can also be seen in our relationship towards companion animals). This idea of speciesism seems to be empirically spot-on and a major problem with the inconsistencies found in the virtues of humans.

To give one example, human babies do not possess language and are scientifically looked at as less intelligent and rational than many adult non-human animals. Despite this, human babies are still afforded moral consideration while the other, more intelligent and/or rational, animals are not. These actions are speciesist; they are attempting to discern that

simply because the human baby happens to be a human it is granted moral value for no further reason other than his/her species, whereas those who meet the stated guidelines are not, other animals are not granted the same moral value because they're not human. Furthermore, these sorts of criteria are sometimes reversed in that it isn't such that a human "lacks" some moral criteria yet still receives moral value, but instead that an animal possesses such a moral criteria which affords moral value to humans yet the animal still does not receive moral value. A famous example of this is Koko, a gorilla who has learned American Sign Language, knowing approximately 2,000 English words and is able to communicate effectively using these words with humans. (Koko) If one, as is often the case, uses language as a moral criteria to afford someone moral value, Koko should definitely have moral value but she remains without its application. This is outright speciesism. Moral value then, according to Singer, is based on sentience. Sentience thus avoids speciesism and instead is based on maximizing happiness and minimizing pain with all parts being equal.

Peter Singer's argument not only strengthens why we *should* consider animals in our moral value, it, in some ways, more importantly picks out the inconsistencies within our justifications for currently excluding many animals from this moral value. Many humans are speciesist, sometimes without recognizing it; they view humans as a 'top tier' species, with all other species being secondary or lesser-than, sometimes even supporting the idea that the only use(s) an animal has is what s/he can do for humans. This huge inconsistency in the majority's thoughts and behaviors may have been pointed out by Singer and others, but utilitarianism does not give someone the essential tools to remedy this inconsistency on a personal level; they may recognize it as wrong, foolish, or unsupported to have these inconsistent beliefs but they are not given an actual practical approach to 'fixing' it on a personal level, but rather on

a broader level that sometimes separates the individual from the action. Virtue ethics, however, is remedial to just this: it gives the tools necessary for someone to maintain consistency in both intention and action while living a flourishing life by doing what a virtuous person would characteristically do (and in this case, a completely virtuous person would consider their incorporation of animals in their moral value).

So, while the leading arguments of today which are in favor of animal moral value have been deemed worthy by many, they lack the key ingredients of character development, and thus of follow-through and follow-up. Establishing that animals have moral rights or establishing animals are sentient so they therefore should be protected is a huge gain to the movement in that it offers legitimacy. However, the lack of attention on the humans required to make these legitimate arguments work is concerning. Animals' protection against abuses, grievances, suffering, and being used merely as a means should be included, rather than being left out, within our efforts to lead a virtuous life and in our efforts to argue efficiently for these protections.

The Necessary Next Step

Singer, Regan, and countless others have done a great service to the animal liberation movement with their approaches. Establishing animals as viable and deserving beings worthy of moral value created the avalanche of grassroots campaigns, legislation initiatives, and thousands of people taking notice to both their own actions and the actions of others. However, while change is slowly occurring throughout the world for various instances of animal cruelty – from agriculture to fashion to trapping and hunting – systematic, long-

standing change is still slow. For example, in the United States, about 5% of its population is vegetarian (refraining from eating meat) and about half that is comprised of vegans (refraining from animal products in general) (Humane Research Council, 2011), and while these numbers are minimally increased each year (Ibid), they are still too significantly low (this percentage equates to roughly 7.9 million adult vegans within a society of 311.5 million adults total) to expect a withstanding difference for animals within factory farms, with factory farms abusing and killing billions of animals annually in the United States alone. (Ibid) It is here that I argue this change, and others, are remaining so slow and inconsistent due to the resistance from the majority who, regardless of understanding Singer's and Regan's arguments, either do not know how to go about addressing this understanding or do not see the significance between it and their own behavior.

There has been too long of a focus on showing animals' worth for moral value and not enough attention to the agents involved in making this moral value matter. One can say someone has a right² to something and this right could be true, but until enough individuals decide to grant this right it remains a fanciful concept – meaningful in its theory but worthless in its application. It is here which the animal liberation movement has rested for quite some time and it is here where focusing on developing more complete virtuous persons is vital for its progression.

Previous arguments for animals' moral value or moral rights hung from the principle to 'not be a party to practices that cause suffering or infringe on someone's intrinsic rights.'

² I do not mean "right" as in moral or legal rights, but rather in regards to something belonging to someone and them having ownership of either it: either a tangible object, such as a house, or to something more abstract, such as privacy.

(Hursthouse, 2006) This gives action guidance but only when the action is affecting the agent. Hursthouse gives an example of this with cosmetics and animal testing. Those who purchase cosmetics are, by these theories, given action guidance which states not to purchase or use cosmetics that use animal experimentation. This, however, only applies to those who, for whatever reason, purchase and use cosmetics. It is dependent on what someone can do in a given situation. This could then be expanded to medical experimentation in which an agent may agree with the argument of experimentation being cruel and/or that it infringes upon the moral rights of the animals being experimented on, but this is where the argument and agreement tends to stop. (Ibid) The current theories tell us something is wrong but unless we're involved, directly or indirectly, it does not tell us what we need to do or why we should care to do it. Unless I end up in the hospital needing medical help, I am not in a position to make a decision about the medicine which elicits experimentation. It is at this figurative fork-in-the-road that virtue ethics comes in to bridge the theory and the action from the theory together by introducing us to our own character, not just our actions and decision-making.

At this time, it is important for me to distinguish between arguing that previous approaches are not correct or substantial and from what I am actually doing, which is arguing previous approaches are simply not sufficient enough at this point in discussing animals' moral value. 'Animal Liberation' and 'The Case for Animal Rights' were written in 1975 and 1985, respectively, so while these ethical theories' approaches were necessary in establishing animals as worthy of moral value, it now seems slightly redundant, after hundreds of scholars after them wrote similar books, to continue focusing all of the attention on their arguments without further expansion. So presently, it need not matter whether someone leans towards agreeing with Singer's utilitarianism conclusion of maximizing happiness and minimizing

pain, with animals being included in the equation, or if someone agrees with Regan's subjects-of-a-life criteria, asserting animals have basic moral rights which should be afforded to them. Both of these ethical arguments get at the crux of one of the issues at hand: do animals have moral value and why? Once someone is able to latch on to the rationale behind one of these arguments, it is here where virtue ethics would be a necessary component in completing the puzzle. One could also disagree with both of these theories yet turn to virtue ethics alone for guidance in how they are to live in accordance to animals if they were to include animals in their scope of living a flourishing life. Either way, I argue virtue ethics is a necessary component for the animal liberation movement because it is the humans' actions towards animals which cause the most distress and suffering to the animals as a whole and it is the humans' actions, mixed with their intentions, which determine the outcome of what occurs to the animals.

This is why encouraging virtuous character, rather than only setting a standard for moral value, is pivotal in evoking positive change, and why without it the movement is met with such resistance. The majority of people in the United States, I argue, do not see the connection between understanding an animal may be worth moral value and their attempts in living a flourishing life. Their actions could come about for a variety of reasons: one may act a certain way because it's socially accepted, lawful, they are under pressure to do so, or they wish to live a flourishing life, with the latter being viewed as the most important. But without an actual change to include animals' moral value, lasting retention for the treatment and view of animals will remain only slight. Currently the exclusion of respecting animals' moral value is socially accepted, it is lawful, many are not under a pressure to do so, and it is not seen as being tied up with the ability of living a flourishing life.

The Virtue of Compassion

Previously, I discussed the idea of what Hursthouse calls “imperfect degrees of virtues” (Hursthouse, 2006). I then renamed this basic idea ‘incomplete virtues’ to better fit my argument linguistically because, while many may agree that someone is virtuous, they may not actually be completely virtuous in a trait.

These traits may be seen as incomplete because of ignorance and/or because there has been little to no nurturing of certain ‘missing’ traits. This nurturing must extend throughout the lifetime. It is not enough to be a child and have your mother tell you it is wrong to steal so you refrain from stealing a candy bar. This nurturing must be ongoing and the refrainment of stealing must be ongoing. Similarly, it is not enough for a parent to tell their child not to pull the cat’s tail, but again must be an ongoing nurturing. This concept of an incomplete virtue compared to a seemingly complete virtue (not to be confused with an actual complete virtue, which includes animals) can be attested with the much admirable virtue of compassion.³

Compassion is one of the easiest virtues to apply to persons; it does not take much knowledge to be compassionate and in many cases, much effort. From early on, beginning as toddlers, most people are taught to be compassionate people at least to some degree. It is also a virtue that I would say is one that many people recognize as being extremely important. An uncompassionate person is, to my belief, one of the worst vices someone could have due to the relationship it shares to other virtues, such as loyalty or benevolence. It seems compassion

³ I am defining compassion here as “Sympathetic awareness of others' distress together with a desire to alleviate it.” (<http://www.virtuescience.com/virtuelist.html>, accessed April 20, 2012).

has an important linkage with many other virtues, and because of this, I will use it as my example.

An individual may think of himself as a compassionate person – he cares about those around them, he feels sympathy for others in times of struggle, he goes out of his way to help someone in need – but he often fail to extend this compassion to animals.⁴ This failure to recognize the exclusion of animals in their contemplation of actions creates incompleteness to the virtue. For virtue ethics, it is simply not enough to be compassionate in some instances and uncompassionate in others (Hursthouse, 1999). There not only has to be a consistency involved in someone’s virtues but a whole heartedness to both their intent and their actions. One cannot claim compassion as a virtue because of their intention and actions to humans alone; one must be compassionate throughout towards all beings with moral value.

Therefore, when we consider someone compassionate, we should include their compassion towards animals to practice a completed virtue. It is not sufficient enough to claim someone who is compassionate towards humans as compassionate *enough* or compassionate *altogether*. There is more to the virtues, such as compassion, than what it means to be x to humans. One should, if they wish to live a truly flourishing life, begin including what it means to be x to animals. Until then, we are incomplete in our virtues. If I go out of my way to help a human in need but I walk past a bird in obvious distress – limping, bleeding, chirping incessantly, etc. – and I do nothing to try to help, there is something highly inconsistent with calling myself (or having anyone call me) a compassionate person. It seems

⁴ I will note an exception to this in U.S. society with companion animals; most people would not find someone to be compassionate if they were directly cruel towards a dog or a cat, such as violently kicking a dog or starving a cat to death. However, with that said, this does not touch on the indirect cruelties many people take part in, such as buying from breeders instead of adopting or witnessing abuse/neglect of a dog or cat without reporting the incident.

this type of compassion, or these types of incomplete virtues, are highly conditional and lead us to be inactive or even directly harmful to animals because of the conditions which have been placed on the virtues we learn.

These inconsistencies are also found beyond humans, in our mixed feelings about animals themselves. In the United States, there are high levels of adoration for companion animals, namely dogs and cats. Our incomplete virtues thus expand to them as well but in different scenarios. In the example above about the wounded bird, if we were to switch that scenario to being a wounded cat and someone walked by without even attempting to help, I'd gather many people *would* view this as highly uncompassionate and would see this action as a vice (whereas, I'd again gather, only some people would see this situation as a vice if it involved a wild bird). Commonly, we are to not harm the dog or cat due to what we have been taught about their role in our society – our virtues, thus, have guided our responses to them through how we have been taught from parental figures telling us to be kind to a cat or laws amending companion animals' place in society as not just 'property' like all other animals, but instead as 'pets.' They are, under the law, still titled as property but dogs and cats have a special condition which protects them, through the law, from gross abuse and neglect while other animals do not have this same condition. (Animal Law) We then take these types of conditions and use them in establishing and assessing our own virtues. If the laws or our parents or our society in general says it is okay to be indifferent, or sometimes even cruel, to animals with the exception of companion animals, then doing just that will not make one uncompassionate in one another's view. We are then saved from having to be held responsible for our decisions against animals with moral value; we are free to be uncompassionate under this current incomplete virtue set while still being praised as a compassionate human being.

Again I argue the animal liberation movement cannot move forward fast enough with foolish and inconsistent ideas such as these.

Laws and Role Modeling Behavior

In reference to laws and the inconsistencies found in our laws, I turn to them to argue how they could potentially be the largest asset to the animal liberation movement not only in terms of actually causing mandatory change (such as a law which places strict regulations on agricultural practices and is then enforced) but also in regards to how the majority of people then would connect their actions towards animals to their ability to flourish in life. Questions would be raised as to why the laws care about animals? What made animals substantial enough to be protected fully by laws? And what part do I play in following these laws? A major piece of virtue ethics is to evaluate and reevaluate your decisions and intent behind such decisions, checking for and remedying inconsistencies. (Hursthouse, 1999) If laws were to better suit a complete-virtue standard, these questions would arise more frequently and be addressed more adequately. In other words, more attention would be brought to people's inconsistencies in their virtues, as incomplete.

Laws are not morality's source and not all laws dictate morality; while the two are not synonymous for each other, this does not mean the two do not play a pivotal role in each other's existence. It almost goes without saying that laws dictate our behavior. We are taught to follow laws, to obey them to both avoid punishment and to lead a harmonious life within society. Many of the laws that are in place and enforced are those critical to our society's functionality – the ability for our society to thrive in terms of being successful, safe, and fair – and the language in which a particular law is written is how we receive information of what is

acceptable and what is unacceptable. The laws are essentially written documents, both for the sake of preservation and for fairness and equality in understanding. Laws must be widely available and spread throughout the areas in which it covers (About Humanism) for them to be accessible to everyone and for everyone to rationally be held accountable. We learn much of what is deemed right and wrong by society from such laws.

Laws must also be ambiguous enough to be interpreted for many situations yet specific enough to provide clarification of intent. Currently, however, laws dealing with the protection of animals have jolted towards the ambiguous side so far that many of its interpretations are in favor of anthropocentric gain, rather than true protection for the animal's sake. There is a widespread lack of clarification on how one should treat animals both morally and legally, and this trickles into our current understanding of virtuous behavior and what it means to live a 'good' or 'right' or 'virtuous' life in our dealings with animals; namely, this understanding is very confused and schizophrenic. It is this same sentiment in which I argue of why action is not enough; if one were to tell someone to act morally based on a certain law and they follow what is said, they could act in one of two ways: 1.) they act in accordance to the law after deciding it is what they morally feel is correct or virtuous or, 2.) they act in accordance to a law because they wish to avoid punishment. Now, let us say, this law to be followed is ambiguous and concerns the treatment of companion animals.⁵ This person is lawful, so there is no concern over whether they will follow the law, but they are not whole hearted, or in other words, do not possess complete virtues in their concern for animals or their concern for animals' placement in their own lives, so they take this ambiguous law in the most relaxed position possible: following the code of the law while disregarding the question

⁵ I use "companion animals" instead of what the law refers to as "Pets," or worse, "property," due to the more positive connotation associated with it.

of whether it is morally correct or virtuosic in character. They then find it acceptable to beat their dog, which leads to severe injuries, because of one frustration or another. The attempt at avoiding punishment by abiding by an ambiguous law that fails to assert moral value for animals while not necessarily being concerned about the animal is often the case in the United States.

An example of this is the ambiguous terminology of how the law defines ‘animal.’ For instance, The Humane Slaughter Act (HSA) was introduced due to high demand from the public in 1958 for protection laws of ‘livestock’ animals yet makes rather funny references to what is and is not an animal and what is “humane.”

No method of slaughtering or handling in connection with slaughtering shall be deemed to comply with the public policy of the United States unless it is humane. Either of the following

two methods of slaughtering and handling are hereby found to be humane:

(a) in the case of cattle, calves, horses, mules, sheep, swine, and other livestock, all animals are rendered insensible to pain by a single blow or gunshot or an electrical, chemical or other means that is rapid and effective, before being shackled, hoisted, thrown, cast, or cut;

or

(b) by slaughtering in accordance with the ritual requirements of the Jewish faith or any other religious faith that prescribes a method of slaughter whereby the animal suffers loss of

consciousness by anemia of the brain caused by the simultaneous and instantaneous severance of the carotid arteries with a sharp instrument and handling in connection with

such slaughtering.(Animal Law)

Firstly, the detailed listing of species of animals protected by this law in (a) while only stating after words “other animals” leaves much room of ambiguity. Specifically, it leaves out poultry species such as ducks, chickens, and turkeys, from its list of animals. Instead, they are to be assumed under “other animals” without specification. Referring back to the person who does not have complete virtues concerning animals but rather only looks at the law in terms of abiding by what it says to avoid punishment, we are able to see a large problem with this type of ambiguity. Let us expand this person as a factory farm owner; he would have no need to specifically apply this law to types of poultry, such as chickens. This law also does not protect the animal during his or her life but only provides some protection during their slaughter. Again, leaving open much debate as to how an animal should be treated during their actual lifetime. So, once again, it is not until our virtues include animals that many individuals will actually go out of our way (although I beg the question as to whether it actually is as big of an inconvenience as some claim) to protect, help, or otherwise leave them alone.

Some argue virtue ethics is egotistical in that it only instructs people to be good in order to be a virtuous person – necessary to live a flourishing life – instead of being good for the sake of being good. I would like to respond to this in two separate parts; 1.) Other ethical theories also have this ‘problem,’ and 2.) I argue it is not so much of a problem but rather, a side effect. So, first, deontology and utilitarianism also struggle with egoism. If one were to visit a friend in the hospital under deontology, they’d be visiting due to following a rule-set which establishes one to be compassionate. If one were to visit a friend in the hospital under utilitarianism, they’d be visiting due to the principle of maximizing happiness (assuming the friend would be happy to see the person) and minimizing pain. If one were to visit a friend in the hospital under virtue ethics, they’d be visiting due to being a virtuous person and doing

what a virtuous person would characteristically do. (Hursthouse, 1999) However, I think this objection ignores the possibility of this not mattering all that much. For virtue ethics, intention matters greatly in why someone is performing an action and while the intention may have a side effect of involving being a virtuous person and living a flourishing life, it does not seem to be assuming too much to state a virtuous person *would* be someone to deeply care for their friend and want to visit them in the hospital for the friend's own sake.

I mention this objection because of, as I have stated, relating our actions with animals as being meaningful for our own lives – not just theirs. While obviously it would probably be more beneficial for someone to care both about themselves and the animals, I do not think it necessarily has to be because someone 'loves' animals or feels bad for them. Rather, if one were to decide not to partake in actions which harm animals because they understand animals have moral value and are worthy of such consideration and that in taking such actions they're then able to live a flourishing life, I believe this to be perfectly acceptable. Egoism, if coupled with other reasons, is not bad or wrong. It could be a very strong tool for change because it gets right to the individual and their own lives, usually providing the most motivation to act. It is this type of incorporation between what Singer and Regan did and what virtue ethics does which moves me to argue virtue ethics as the animal liberation movement's missing link. Usually it does take a personal impact to evoke someone to change their behavior.

With the idea of egoism, or self-interest, many people do not break laws when they perform violent actions towards animals and are protected against responsibility from such actions. While there are provisions regarding *how far* they're allowed to take this violence, factory farm workers, for example, perform violent procedures against animals daily and receive payment for these actions. By law, if an action is seen as routine in the business of

agriculture, it is permissible to perform. For example, the clipping of baby chicks' beaks without anesthesia, a highly painful procedure, is noted as "common husbandry practices" so is allowed to occur consistently to almost every chicken used in factory farming, whether they are "egg-laying hens" or "broiler chickens." (Animal Welfare) These actions are inconsistent with being a completely virtuous person but are parts of the rules, or laws, which large amounts of individuals in the United States learn their behavior of right and wrong from.

The schizophrenia found in law about animals reflects the schizophrenia we have in our virtues. We may love *our* dog yet eat parts of *a* cow and since it is perfectly acceptable and lawful for a virtuous person to eat meat, the slaughtering of billions of animals annually continues (HSUS) without too much thought as to how these practices reflect our virtues. Ultimately, we are tied to a system that encourages schizophrenic reasoning in our dealings with animals; our agreement with animals being worthy of moral value, even to a very slight degree, typically do not match our actions. One may treat their dog like a member of the family, yet have steak for dinner and take trips to zoos, circuses, and rodeos. It is this lack of consistency which is at the root of why the progression of expanding moral concern to animals has been stalled so frequently and it is this lack of consistency which virtue ethics aims to remedy.

If virtue ethics is more readily applied, eventually it most likely would no longer be socially acceptable to pursue detrimental actions towards animals, but rather these actions would be looked at as warranting an explanation or defense; no longer would those who are consistent in their ideals and actions be asked to defend themselves of why they do not use animals negatively. Instead, this would be reversed.

All of this, however, brings us into how these types of virtuous teachings should or more importantly, could be applied to laws. Laws are, of course, slow changing and follow precedent. This is where I argue firmly I am not under the fanciful belief this paradigm shift will occur over night but instead that it is one of *several* tools to use in our attempts to make more consistent, fluid, and complete virtues for ourselves through the inclusion of animals. From this, I'd also argue it is within the laws the animal liberation movement has, and will, face its greatest resistance because of the massive power it would bring to those who wish to act in accordance with animals' moral value. It could be objected that my reasoning seems circular: I am saying we should change laws to better reflect complete virtues which include animals to teach us to follow these virtues but in order to change the laws to do just this we need to be the type of virtuous person who would include animals. As much as this would be true if there was no one with complete virtues of including animals, this need not be an issue. There are, by empirical evidence of veganism gaining popularity, media coverage on gross abuse/neglect cases of animals, and the like, those who already do include animals in their virtues in order to lead a flourishing life. This process would begin with them.

A Call to Action

From these people who endorse complete virtues, we will begin establishing such teachings and such law changes. There has to be, however, a stronger advancement of these beliefs and our reasons for such beliefs: not just in terms of the animal but the human as well. In a way, this is a call to action; applying virtue ethics to animals is, as I have argued, essential in the animal liberation movement progression but again, it is up the humans involved in order to make the decisions necessary for it to work. Just as with other social

movements, such as women suffrage, it takes much advocacy and a lot of time for there to be a large-scale difference. Looking towards the human instead of only concentrating on the animals will help facilitate just this.

These changes for the benefit of animals really do rely on those who already have even some inclination towards thinking about animals as beings with moral value. I then urge those people with this inclination to examine their beliefs, struggle with and remedy their inconsistencies, and begin pressing complete virtues as being exemplar of what it actually means to be a virtuous person, even by simple actions of not considering someone as compassionate if they are uncompassionate to animals or not remaining inactive if one is being uncompassionate towards an animal. If someone agrees with Singer and/or Regan's arguments for animals' moral value, or if they turn to virtue ethics completely for action guidance with animals' moral value, it is here where we can then apply responsibility to the human to abide by these arguments in a realistic way. It is here, with small steps of completing our virtues, we will see the biggest positive change for animals' and, in many ways, for ourselves.

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