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Tatjana Višak, *Capacity for Welfare across Species.*
New York: Oxford University Press, 2022. 152 pp.

The principle of equal consideration of interests—according to which similar interests deserve similar weights in our moral deliberations, regardless of whose interests they are—appears to have uncomfortable implications. If, for instance, humans and hens have equally strong interests in continued existence, then in lifeboat cases where we have to choose between saving humans and saving equal numbers of hens, it could work out that, according to some moral theories, we ought to flip a coin.

Many philosophers have wanted to avoid such implications. Some have argued that humans and many nonhuman animals have different *capacities for welfare*—that things can go better and worse for humans than for many nonhuman animals and, therefore, that humans often have more at stake in difficult tradeoff cases.

Tatjana Višak disagrees: her new book offers one of the few sustained defenses of the idea that all welfare subjects have the same capacity for welfare. More precisely, Višak distinguishes two views in the first chapter:

DIF: Welfare subjects, such as humans, dogs, and mice, have fundamentally different capacities for welfare, due to their different cognitive or emotional capacities (10).

EQU: Welfare subjects have fundamentally equal capacities for welfare, despite their different cognitive or emotional capacities (12).

Višak makes a negative and positive case for EQU. The negative case appears in the second chapter where she criticizes the arguments of philosophers who are mostly not challenging EQU but are rather assuming DIF and trying to explain how it could be true. We agree with her that, if framed as arguments against EQU, their arguments don't succeed. So, we set that material aside.

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The positive argument starts in chapter 3, where Višak gives three main arguments. First, she argues that the most natural interpretation of the way that animal welfare scientists talk supports EQU over DIF. This is because, on her view, they talk as though welfare is a relative rather than absolute notion, where a subject's welfare is determined by the *percentage* of achievable net good rather than the *absolute* quantity of achievable net good. And *if* a subject's welfare is determined by the percentage of achievable net good rather than the absolute quantity of achievable net good, then every welfare subject maxes out at 100 percent; so every welfare subject has the same capacity for welfare—as EQU claims.

Second, Višak's argues that the most plausible (nonhedonic) accounts of well-being also assume a relative rather than an absolute conception of that notion. For instance, Višak presents Peter Sandøe's (1996: 12) version of preference satisfaction:

A subject's welfare at a given point in time, t_1, is relative to the degree of agreement between what he/it at t_1 prefers . . . and how he/it at t_1 sees his/its situation—the better agreement the better welfare.

As Višak understands this view, this is a straightforward example where the extent to which an animal is well-off is determined by the extent to which its preferences are satisfied, irrespective of the quantity or strength of the preferences.

Third, Višak presents an evolutionary argument to the effect that the best account of hedonic states entails that the hedonic scale is relative for all animals; so, again, EQU is true even if hedonism is the correct account of well-being. As Višak sees it, hedonic capacity "provides a rough and ready aid for picking out the actions that tend to facilitate physiological homeostasis, fulfillment of needs, and survival" (78). The total quantity of pleasure an animal feels in response to a stimulus is determined by the 'usefulness' of the stimulus in helping the animal maintain homeostasis. Since animals all need this flexible ability to make choices from among their set of options, she thinks it wouldn't "make sense" for some animals to have a hedonic capacity ranging from, say, "*mildly pleasant* to *mildly unpleasant*, while others have one that ranges from *extremely pleasant* to *extremely unpleasant*" (82). She adds that the "hedonicity axis is supposed to track usefulness, and usefulness here is a relative notion: useful for the survival of the individual in question and useful relative to alternatives" (82). This is what's supposed to provide an equalizing limit to the amount of net pleasure any animal can feel.

It matters whether DIF or EQU is true, and despite the obvious importance of the issue, it has received much less philosophical attention than we might expect. Višak's book is an engaging and thoughtful contribution to an important and growing conversation about capacity for welfare across species. However, we have significant reservations about the particular arguments she develops for EQU.

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With respect to her first argument about the views of animal welfare scientists, it's unclear why we ought to defer to them about the nature of well-being. Since they are focused on making recommendations for animal husbandry that would, if implemented, improve animals' welfare, they are interested in talking about welfare in a way that lends itself to *assessing* welfare *within a single species*—not determining the fundamental constituents of well-being or making comparisons *across* species.

With respect to her second argument about the best interpretations of standard theories of well-being, Višak's readings are implausible. In Sandøe's case, he is talking about how to calculate the extent to which a welfare subject reaches its maximum potential for welfare without taking a stance on capacity for welfare. In other words, the more a creatures' preferences align with how it sees its situation, the better off it is, a point that's consistent with synchronic welfare being determined by the strength and number of such preferences being satisfied.

With respect to her third argument about the function of hedonic states, there's no reason to think that an owl's extraordinary vision is just as useful for it as a naked mole rat's rudimentary ability to distinguish between light and dark is useful for it, even though both visual systems are tracking usefulness. Likewise, there is no reason to think that all animals' hedonic capacities are equally useful, even though they are indeed tracking usefulness in the sense Višak has in mind. This is because there is no reason, in general, to think that evolution produces equally useful capacities for animals across taxa.

We are, therefore, rather skeptical of Višak's positive arguments for EQU. For all that, EQU could be true. Still, it's important to note that insofar as the case for EQU depends on relative views of well-being, those face serious objections. In particular, they struggle to handle cases where the *quantity of good* and *relativizing principles* shift. Let's again consider a relativized version of preference-satisfactionism. On such a view, how well-off a subject is at any point in time is determined by the extent to which their preferences are satisfied, irrespective of the number or strength of preferences. A closely related relativized desire satisfactionism would hold that how well-off one is at any point in time is determined by the extent to which their (existing or dispositional) desires are satisfied, irrespective of the number or strength of such desires.

These views implausibly imply that it would be prudentially required to deliberately reduce their total quantity of preferences (desire) satisfaction whenever doing so would increase the extent to which their preferences (desires) are satisfied. To illustrate, consider the case of *Elderly Eileen.*

Elderly Eileen lives an unusually good life. She's a complex person with many strong and complex preferences (desires), all of which are miraculously satisfied but one: she has the mildest preference (desire) that the Phoenix Suns win the NBA championship, a preference (desire) that will never be satisfied during the remainder of her life. She barely cares about this, though, and it

occupies mere seconds of her thought annually. When she is reminded of their failure to win, she shrugs it off with *near* indifference, quickly forgetting about them until the next NBA championship.

Eileen is offered the following choice. She is given the option of taking a pill that would change her preference (desire) about the Suns, instilling the mildest preference (desire) that the Suns lose the NBA championship every year. The side effects of such a pill, however, are that it eradicates every other preference (desire) of Eileen's and renders her incapable of having preferences about any of these things.

Is it in Eileen's prudential interest to take this pill? No: she'll have far fewer, and more minor, preferences (desires) satisfied. However, relativized versions of preference or desire satisfactionism entail that Eileen is prudentially required to take the pill. After all, if she does, the sole preference (desire) she has will be satisfied. Her list of preferences (desires) will have shrunk exponentially, but its one item—the mildest preference for a Suns victory—will be satisfied. So this relativized version of welfare must be wrong.

This problem generalizes: every relativized view has a structure that entails that the amount of prudential value is bounded by the relativizing principle in question. In order to ensure that the view entails EQU, any candidate for a nonhedonic fundamental good that seemingly comes in different quantities (for instance, nature fulfillment; achievement; objective list goods; subjective list goods) will be leveled by the relativizing principle. Once this is done, it opens itself up to counterexamples where the *degree to which* the potential goods in question are realized is greater as a result of making the *overall quantity* of achievable goods much smaller.

The implausible consequences are especially stark when considering the relationship between synchronic and diachronic welfare, the subject of chapter 4. Her view implies, for instance, that it's better to have less desire-satisfaction spread across time than to have an exponentially larger quantity over a slightly shorter period of time. Moreover, since these are nonhedonic goods, every structurally identical counterexample can also come at the expense of the overall quantity of happiness, joy, eudaimonia, and the like accrued by the being in question. But that's absurd. We can't improve a life by reducing its total net receipt of happiness, preference (desire) satisfaction, accomplishments, valued relationships, and so on across the board.

We conclude, therefore, that Višak's case for EQU is in trouble. Still, her book pushes an important discussion forward. The fifth and final chapter explores the implications of these views. Anyone working in this area will need to grapple with it.

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Monima Chadha, *Selfless Minds: A Contemporary Perspective on Vasubandhu's Metaphysics*.
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As philosophers have increasingly shied away from belief in the soul, the Buddhist doctrine of "no-self" (*anātman*)—the idea that there is no real enduring entity to underpin our commonsense notion of a continuous, living being—has garnered growing respect. Monima Chadha's *Selfless Minds: A Contemporary Perspective on Vasubandhu's Metaphysics* brings classical Buddhist philosophical positions into vigorous engagement with current perspectives. Buddhist no-self is not merely a charming presage of modern discoveries but a live option only ignored to the detriment of current conversation. In particular, to consider seriously the positions of Vasubandhu (fourth/fifth century), the most influential Indian Buddhist philosopher to take up the topic, is to acknowledge a serious challenge to standard presuppositions about a wide range of "self"-centered topics in philosophy.

The book is of immediate use for students and nonspecialists, since Chadha's opening chapters provide admirable introductions to the basics of Indian Buddhist philosophy (chap. 1) and the approach to no-self in the Abhidharma traditions in which Vasubandhu is the central representative (chap. 2). Subsequent chapters argue that Vasubandhu can help address, under a no-self view: the ostensibly "subjective" character of conscious experience (chap. 3); the functionality of memory (chap. 4); the experience of synchronic unity ("binding," chap. 5); the phenomenology of agency (chap. 6); and the phenomenology of ownership (chap. 7). On each of these topics, Chadha's chapter explicates and defends Vasubandhu's position in light of current philosophy and cognitive science. In her final chapters, Chadha considers, and finds wanting, the ethical implications of Vasubandhu's no-self view (chap. 8) and its concomitant path of practice (chap. 9).

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