

BETWEEN THE SPECIES

Noble Animals, Brutish Animals

ABSTRACT

The paper begins with a description of a grey seal performing conspecific infanticide. The paper then gives an account of “nobleness” and “brutishness.” Roughly, a behavioural-disposition is noble/brutish if it is one that would be a moral virtue/vice if the possessor of the behavioural-disposition were a moral agent. The paper then advances two pairs of axiological claims. The first pair of claims is that nobleness is good and that brutishness is bad. The second pair of claims is about an axiological interaction between nobleness/brutishness and well-being. That any non-human animal lacks well-being is bad. Yet, it is worse that a noble non-human animal lacks well-being, and not so bad that a brutish non-human animal lacks well-being. Lastly, the paper discusses some potential moral implications of these axiological claims, for instance that factory farming is especially wrong because it causes noble non-human animals to lack well-being.

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Introduction¹

“On the 2nd December 2014 an adult male grey seal was seen catching a weaned grey seal pup on the Isle of May. The pup was presumed weaned due to its close proximity to other pups of similar age and the absence of adult females without pups in the immediate vicinity. It held the pup by the scruff of the neck and dragged it to a shallow freshwater pool. The adult then climbed on top of the pup, forced its head under water and held it until its struggles subsided. The male seal then proceeded to bite the back of the neck and simultaneously pull back with its head while pushing away with his fore flipper. This caused the skin to tear and caused the blubber layer along the line of the tear to detach from the underlying body musculature. The study male then forced his lower jaw under the lip of the tear, biting down on the skin and then pulling back from the wound before swallowing several small sections of blubber and skin... The process from the capture event to the discarding of the carcass lasted approximately 41 minutes... Over the next six days the male was observed catching four more weaned pups and killing them using a similar method. This resulted in similar wounds and in each case the male ate a quantity of blubber... In addition, a further three pup carcasses with similar wounds were retrieved... Over an 11 day period an additional six pup carcasses were retrieved

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from a tide channel adjacent to the freshwater pools.”
(Brownlow et al. 2016, 4–5)

This paper discusses what properties we may correctly attribute to non-human animals such as this grey seal, the value of those properties, and the moral significance of the value of those properties for various human practices that affect non-human animals. The first section of the paper, drawing on some little-discussed passages from Aristotle, gives an account of nobleness and brutishness. Roughly, a behavioural-disposition is noble if it is a behavioural-disposition that would be a moral virtue if the possessor of the behavioural-disposition were a moral agent, and a behavioural-disposition is brutish if it is a behavioural-disposition that would be a moral vice if the possessor of the behavioural-disposition were a moral agent. Brutishness (*theriotes*) is a term used by Aristotle. Aristotle introduces no term for the opposite property, though A.M MacIver writes briefly of non-human animals as having “noble impulses” (MacIver 1948, 67). Nobleness is a term that may have various connotations, as is the other term I considered using for this property, “sweetness.” I ask the reader to put aside these connotations.

The second section of the paper advances two pairs of axiological claims. The first pair of claims is (i) that nobleness is good and (ii) that brutishness is bad. The second pair of claims is about an axiological interaction between brutishness or nobleness and well-being. That any non-human animal lacks well-being is bad. I argue (iii) that a non-human animal lacks well-being and is noble is even worse than if that non-human animal lacked well-being and were not noble, and (iv) that a non-human animal lacks well-being and is brutish is not as bad

as if that non-human animal lacked well-being and were not brutish.

On most moral theories these axiological claims have moral implications for human practices that affect non-human animals. Without committing to any particular moral theory, the third section of the paper uses a simple form of consequentialism as a model moral theory for the purposes of illustration. On this model, (i) and (ii) alter the moral reasons we have for making conservation efforts, (iii) adds an additional moral reason to refrain from practices that cause noble non-human animals to lack well-being, such as factory farming, and (iv) lessens the moral reason we have to refrain from practices that cause brutish non-human animals to lack well-being, such as (perhaps) fox hunting.

Brutishness and Nobleness

We regularly use terms of virtue and vice to describe non-human animals (token individuals or types) and their behavioural-dispositions, e.g. “That macaque is *greedy*,” “Beavers are *diligent*,” “The infant mammal’s mother is very *generous* to it,” “Your dog is *aggressive* and *irascible*, but my dog is *gentle* and *patient*.” What should we make of the use of these terms? Are they literal attributions of virtue and vice, or attributions of some other properties?

On traditional views of virtue and vice, to have a virtue or a vice requires having the cognitive or volitional capacity required for moral agency, e.g., prudential reason (*phronesis*) (Aristotle 2011, 1145a), or being able to act from the representation of duty (Kant 2015, 5:82). Plausibly, almost all non-human animals do not have this capacity. Accordingly, on traditional understandings, the use of terms of virtue and vice in relation

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to non-human animals are seen as metaphorical (Aristotle 2011, 1150a) or figurative (Kant 1997, 27:46). The extant sketches of this approach seem incomplete in that they do not help us distinguish between the sense in which a tidal wave is murderous and the sense in which the grey seal described above is murderous. Granting that both attributions are metaphorical or figurative, the latter comes much closer to the literal attribution of murderousness that might be made of a normal adult human being.

More revisionary views of moral agency agree that some cognitive or volitional capacity is required for moral agency, but suggest accounts of what this capacity is that plausibly some non-human animals do have, e.g., sensitivity to certain sorts of value (Sapontzis 1987), responsiveness to certain salient features of a situation (Clark 1984), having certain sentiments (Waller 1998; De Waal 2006), or sensitivity to certain social norms (Bekoff and Pierce 2009) (for a summary of these views see Clement 2013). On these views, some uses of virtue and vice terms for non-human animals might be literal attributions of vice and virtue and other uses metaphorical or figurative. However, this seems lacking. Various insects mate by traumatic insemination (in which the female's abdomen is pierced by the male's reproductive organ). Plausibly, these insects lack the capacities list above, so to say that they have a vice like violence would be metaphorical or figurative. Granting that this is so, we nevertheless want to distinguish between the sense in which such insects are violent and the sense in which the tidal wave is violent.

Another view in the vicinity is that of Mark Rowlands who argues that some non-human animals, although not moral agents, are moral subjects in that they have "morally laden emo-

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tions [which] motivate animals to act by providing reasons for those actions” (Rowlands 2012, 35). It is not clear that our use of vice and virtue terms tracks moral subjecthood any more than it tracks moral agenthood. It is hard to say which non-human animals do or do not have morally laden emotions. Yet, supposing that traumatic insemination behaviour is engaged in by insects that do not have morally laden emotions, it still seems like there is a difference between the sense in which they are violent and the sense in which the tidal wave is violent.

Some remarks by Aristotle suggest a path forward. Our use of terms of virtue and vice is ambivalent. As made of most humans they are literal attributions. As made of non-human animals they are attributions of the related properties of brutishness and nobleness. Such attributions are still metaphorical or figurative uses of terms of virtue and vice but come much closer to being literal attributions of virtue and vice than the attributions made of the tidal wave.

Aristotle’s account of brutishness is very brief and there is very little secondary literature on his account (Thorp 2003; Curzer 2012). I note what Aristotle says here simply to introduce ideas which I will then develop in my own way, rather than as a piece of Aristotle scholarship. Aristotle says:

“Someone who is by nature such as to be afraid of everything, even if a mouse makes a noise, is a coward whose cowardice is brutish... some who are irrational as a result of nature and live by sense perception alone, like certain tribes of distant barbarians, are brutish.” (Aristotle 2011, 1149a)

“brutishness is a lesser thing than vice, even though it is more frightening, for the better part [of the soul]

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has not been ruined in the case of a brute animal, as it has been in a human being who is vicious; rather, the brute animal does not have that better part.” (Aristotle 2011, 1150a)

It seems that for Aristotle brutishness concerns those behavioural-dispositions that would be vices if they could be regulated by “that better part.” According to Aristotle, non-human animals lack that better part, and some humans lack that better part (such as certain tribes of distant barbarians), and some humans have that better part but for some reason it is unable to regulate certain of their behavioural-dispositions (such as the person who is afraid of everything, who presumably suffers from a mental illness).

I suggest that virtue and vice terms as used of non-human animals are in fact attributions of the properties of nobleness and brutishness. I define noble properties as such:

(1) a behavioural-disposition of some being, (2) that would be a moral virtue for that being, (3) if that being had the capacity required for moral agency, (4) and if that capacity were able to regulate the behavioural-disposition.

I define brutish properties in an equivalent way except that we replace (2) with:

(2*) that would be a moral vice for that being

Imagine the scenario in which grey seals had the capacity required for moral agency and that capacity was able to regulate all of their behavioural-dispositions (they did not suffer from mental illness, etc.) In that scenario, the behavioural-disposi-

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tion of the token grey seal described above, towards killing and cannibalizing seal pups, would very plausibly be a vice. It is an example of a behavioural-disposition that the capacity required for moral agency should dissipate and suppress – through habituation, education, socialization, and the like. As a rough thought experiment for tracking nobleness and brutishness, we can think about whether a society of the rational equivalent of these species should prescribe or proscribe the behavioural-disposition in question. It seems clear that a society of rational grey seals should proscribe the killing and cannibalizing of seal pups. Put otherwise, normal adult human beings have behavioral-dispositions that would simply be noble or brutish, but for our having the capacity for moral agency which makes these things into virtues and vices. Where we find that our capacity for moral agency is unable to regulate the behavioural-disposition in question, we in fact have noble and brutish traits.

On this account, what our use of virtue and vice terms *vis-à-vis* non-human animals pick out is nobleness and brutishness. Non-living phenomena like tidal waves cannot count as noble or brutish because they do not have behavioural-dispositions. Animals, whether insects or grey seals, can count as noble or brutish because they do have behavioral-dispositions, including those of the kind that would count as virtues or vices. I now offer some clarifications about nobleness and brutishness to forestall potential misunderstandings and objections.

First, which behavioural-dispositions count as noble or brutish is relative to each species. Though my definitions of nobleness and brutishness do not require this wider understanding, the traditional understanding of moral virtues is that moral virtues are behavioural-dispositions (specifically, those flowing from the passions) that contribute to a being's flourishing (*eu-*

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damonia) and that moral vices are behavioural-dispositions that detract from a being's flourishing. Different beings may have different flourishing-conditions depending on their nature. In many respects, flourishing for various other species that had the capacity required for moral agency might look different from human flourishing. Our actual use of vice and virtue terms for non-human animals seems to reflect this. That an elephant eats much more than us does not lead us to call it gluttonous, because for its flourishing the elephant's nature prescribes eating much more than we do.

Second, nobleness and brutishness concern the counterfactual of whether the behavioural-disposition in question would contribute to a being's flourishing if it had the capacity required for moral agency, not whether the behavioural-disposition contributes to the being's flourishing now. For instance, the conspecific violence behaviours of meerkats (accounting for around a fifth of adult meerkat deaths (Gomez et al. 2016)) perhaps do in fact contribute to their flourishing, but in the event that these beings became moral agents we can imagine that this violence would not contribute to their flourishing, that conspecific violence should likely be proscribed by their society. This seems to be how we use terms of virtue and vice for human infants. Human infants lack the capacity required for moral agency and have many behavioural-dispositions that likely contribute to their flourishing. Nevertheless, we use terms of vice and virtue to describe these behavioural-dispositions in light of whether they will count as vices and virtues for the moral agents that the infants may become. Hence, behavioural-dispositions like excessive attention seeking, or excessive whining, or hitting others, are brutish for human infants.

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Third, to say that non-human animals have the properties of nobleness and brutishness is not to say that counterfactually they have some property. Rather it is to say that they have some property, which property is defined by reference to something counterfactual (just as a property like a behavioural-disposition is defined by reference to something counterfactual).

Fourth, not all behavioural-dispositions that would or should be transformed by the acquisition of the capacity required for moral agency count as noble or brutish, because those behavioural-dispositions would not be virtues or vices, but rather something like etiquette (or lack thereof) or some other non-moral excellence or failing. That pigs eat from the ground is not brutish even though we can suppose that pigs with the capacity required for moral agency would develop elaborate eating rituals in the way that human beings have.

Fifth, as with vice and virtue, some behavioural-dispositions instantiate the properties of nobility and brutishness more intensely than others. A behavioural-disposition to run away from the great danger of a battle may be cowardly, but a behavioural-disposition to run away from the slightest danger is more cowardly. The behavioural-disposition of an adult grey seal to attack other adult grey seals may be brutish, but the behavioural-disposition of an adult grey seal to kill and cannibalize grey seal pups is more brutish.

Sixth, as with vice and virtue, although plausibly every individual has some behavioural-dispositions that are noble and some that are brutish, overall judgments of whether a token non-human animal is noble or brutish can be made. Mussolini perhaps had many virtues but was clearly a vicious man rather

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than a virtuous man. The grey seal described above perhaps has many noble properties but is clearly brutish.

Seventh, as with virtue and vice, behaviours can fail to be noble or brutish because of their causal origin. For instance, if the grey seal described above has incurred brain damage from its head being smashed on a rock by a wave, or has been drugged by nefarious researchers, it is not brutish. The behaviours of the grey seal are to be attributed to some merely causal process going on in the seal, rather than attributed to the behavioural-dispositions of its non-rational character. For instance, we can ask for what reason a brutish seal kills pups (freeing up resources for its own progeny? intimidating other seals?) just as we can ask for what reason two groups of chimpanzees fight with one another (for status, for food), but we cannot ask for what reason a brain-damaged or drugged seal kills pups – there is no reason. On the other hand, that this behaviour is typical for adult male grey seals, or that it results from some extraordinary confluence of genetic and cultural causes, does not prevent it being brutish.

Eighth, that it is not always clear whether some behavioural-disposition counts as brutish or noble or not does not mean that there are not clear cases. It is perhaps not clear whether the behavioural-disposition of dogs to chase squirrels is brutish (should a society of rational dogs form a *League Against Cruel Sports* and proscribe this?). Nevertheless, it is clear that the behavioural-disposition of Hanuman langurs to conspecific infanticide, accounting for over 30% of all infant deaths in one study (Borries 1997, 144), is brutish. It is clear that the behavioural-disposition of male orangutans to forced copulation, accounting for 36% of all mating attempts in one study (Fox 2002, 95–96), is brutish.

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Ninth, note that attributions of brutishness and nobleness are not the same as aesthetic attributions or attributions of usefulness-to-humans. Seeing snakes copulate is a sight that typically evokes disgust but not one that evokes attributions of brutishness. Dogs that have been trained to attack strangers are useful to their human trainers but brutish. So, appealing to these different attributions as a means of debunking attributions of nobleness and brutishness is not a plausible strategy on its face.

I take it that with this account of nobleness and brutishness I have elucidated properties that we in fact encounter in experience, as when on the one hand we see one dog randomly attacking another or as when on the other hand we see a mother-rat saving her pup from a snake.¹

An additional reason for accepting that nobleness and brutishness are real properties is that they make sense of the discourse of “innocence” that surrounds non-human animals. It is very common for those who object to factory farming to say that it is wrong because it harms non-human animals and because “animals are innocent.” The claim is plausible, if hard to make sense of at first. If “innocent” is taken in its ordinary sense (not guilty, not blameworthy, not worthy of punishment) then this is a strange thing to say. When a tree is cut down it is harmed and the tree is surely not guilty, blameworthy, or worthy of punishment. Yet even if one thinks that cutting down a tree is morally wrong because it harms the tree it would be strange to add “trees are innocent.” Likewise, if we imagine the case in which someone proposed killing the grey seal described above it would seem strange, even to those who thought this would be morally wrong, to say “but he is innocent!” even though the grey seal is not guilty, blameworthy, or worthy of

punishment. Rather, it seems that our saying that a non-human animal is “innocent” expresses the attribution that the non-human animal is noble. We do not say that the tree or the grey seal are innocent since neither are noble, the former by way of having no behavioural-dispositions and the latter by way of having brutish behavioural-dispositions.

Axiological Dimensions of Nobleness and Brutishness

The first pair of axiological claims I will argue for are (i) that nobleness is good, (ii) that brutishness is bad. That is, *ceteris paribus* the presence of nobleness makes a world more valuable, whilst *ceteris paribus* the presence of brutishness makes a world less valuable. I argue for these claims by suggesting that they explain our intuitive judgments about the overall value of three imagined worlds:

World Kalo contains only one species of animal, an animal that lacks the capacity required for moral agency, the Kalon. Kalons have many noble properties and no brutish properties. For instance, when one Kalon is sick other Kalons will forage food for it, when a Kalon dies other Kalons will care for its young. Conspecific violence, infanticide and forced-copulation have never been displayed by Kalons.

World Therio contains only one species of animal, an animal that lacks the capacity required for moral agency, the Therion. Therions have no noble properties and many brutish properties. For instance, when one Therion is sick other Therions take food from its cache, when a Therion dies other Therions will cannibalize its young. Therions procreate exclusively through forced-

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copulation, and infanticide and conspecific violence are very common.

World Meso contains only one species of animal, an animal that lacks the capacity required for moral agency, the Meson. Mesons have neither noble properties nor brutish properties. For instance, although Mesons are as sociable and intelligent as Kalons and Therions, they have a very unusual physiology which precludes one Meson being able to help or harm another and so Mesons do not have behavioural-dispositions toward such things.

Let's stipulate that in other axiological respects these worlds are the same – the total quantity and distribution among individuals of other valuable things like beauty, pleasure, knowledge, and so forth, are the same, as is the number of individuals on each world, the biodiversity of the worlds, etc. Intuitive judgment tells us that *World Kalo* contains more value than *World Meso*. Since the only axiological difference between *World Kalo* and *World Meso* is that the former contains nobleness, the only explanation for this intuitive judgment is that (i) is true. Intuitive judgment tells us that *World Therio* contains less value than *World Meso*. Since the only axiological difference between *World Therio* and *World Meso* is that the former contains brutishness, the only explanation for this intuitive judgment is that (ii) is true. The presence of the behavioral-dispositions that moral agency promotes is good, the presence of the behavioral-dispositions that moral agency curbs and corrects is bad.

The second pair of axiological claims are (iii) that a non-human animal lacks well-being and is noble is even worse than if that non-human animal lacked well-being and were not noble,

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and (iv) that a non-human animal lacks well-being and is brutish is not as bad as if that non-human animal lacked well-being and were not brutish. I argue for these claims in two ways: by suggesting that they explain intuitive judgments about a permutation on these three worlds and by analogy with some similar axiological interactions between well-being and other properties.

Consider again the three worlds described above, with the following addition:

Virus. One day a virus spreads through the Kalons/Therions/Meson, causing each Kalon/Therion/Meson to lack well-being. For instance, each Kalon/Therion/Meson is unable to properly digest its food for a week due to the virus and becomes malnourished.

Here, intuitive judgment says that the value of *World Kalo* has undergone a greater decline than *World Meso*. Since the only difference between *World Kalo* and *World Meso* is that the non-human animals in the former are noble whilst the non-human animals in the latter are not, the only explanation for this intuitive judgment is that (iii) is true. Again, intuitive judgment says that the value of *World Therio* has undergone a lesser diminution of value than *World Meso*. Since the only difference between *World Therio* and *World Meso* is that the non-human animals in the former are brutish whilst the non-human animals in the latter are not, the only explanation for this intuitive judgment is that (iv) is true. Note that this is not to deny that *World Therio* in *Virus* is now less valuable than it was because the brutish Therions now lack well-being, it is only to assert that *World Kalo's* overall value has declined more than *World Therio's*. We feel sadness and sympathy when we think

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about the noble Kalons being malnourished, and we feel much less sadness and sympathy when we think about the brutish Therion's being malnourished. Again, the charitable fundraising efforts that might be made for the suffering Kalons would surely eclipse any efforts made for the suffering Therions.

Well-being is a property that can be properly attributed to many things other than non-human animals (with varying degrees of philosophical dissent): human beings, plants ("That oak tree is flourishing"), social artefacts ("The City of Prague is flourishing," "That trade union is not flourishing"), physical artefacts ("That car is not flourishing").

In these other cases, how bad the lack of well-being of these things is depends on their other properties. If a human being is virtuous, their lack of well-being is worse than if they were not virtuous. If a plant is beautiful, its lack of well-being is worse than if it were not beautiful. If a trade union is corrupt, its lack of well-being is not as bad as if it were free from corruption. If a car is common its lack of well-being is not as bad as if it were unique.

In each case intuitive judgment tells us that the coincidence of a lack of well-being with some good property (moral goodness, beauty, uniqueness) makes that lack of well-being even worse. Likewise, in each case intuitive judgment tells us that the coincidence of a lack of well-being with some bad property (moral badness, ugliness, commonness) makes that lack of well-being less bad. So, by analogy the same should be true of the good property nobleness and the bad property brutishness, (iii) and (iv) should be true.

Moral Implications

What one sees the moral implications of (i-iv) as being will vary depending on what one's preferred moral theory says about the relationship between the right and the good, and on empirical claims about where nobleness and brutishness are to be found. To draw some illustrative moral implications from (i-iv) I will use as a model a simple consequentialist moral theory on which one has moral reason to perform an action in proportion as it will promote aggregate value, with one having the most moral reason to perform the action that will maximize aggregate value. Similar but more complicated moral implications could be drawn on a wide range of moral theories, e.g., a deontological theory on which one has a defeasible duty to promote aggregate value.

On such a model, a moral implication of (i) – that nobleness is good – is that it gives additional moral reason to conserve many non-human animals, those that are noble. Elephants, it seems, are typically noble – they are not prone to conspecific violence or other obviously brutish behavioural-dispositions, and they display behavioural-dispositions towards their kin that among moral agents would count as a virtue like care (Leuthold and Leuthold 1975). So, when assessing the moral reasons we have to conserve elephants, we can add “that their nobleness is good” to the list of things about the existence of elephants that add value to the world, e.g. the pleasure they experience, their beauty, their knowledge, their contribution to biodiversity. Again, to the extent that such a thing is possible, (i) means that there is moral reason to cultivate the nobility of animals, e.g., training dogs to be gentle and patient, managing the social systems of chimpanzees in zoos and sanctuaries to encourage pro-social behaviours (Funkhouser, Mayhew, and Mulcahy 2018).

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On such a model, a moral implication of (iii) – that a non-human animal lacks well-being and is noble is even worse than if that non-human animal lacked well-being and were not noble – is that it gives an additional moral reason to refrain from practices that cause many non-human animals to lack well-being, most obviously factory farming. Cows, pigs, sheep, chickens, and other commonly factory farmed non-human animals seem in the main to either be noble or to not be obviously brutish. So far as I can discover, such beings do not engage in conspecific infanticide or have other obviously brutish behavioural-dispositions. Again, mother-cows and mother-pigs have behavioural-dispositions towards their calves and piglets that among moral agents would count as a virtue like care (Algers and Uvnäs-Moberg 2007; Smith Thomas 2011). So, when assessing the moral reasons that we have to refrain from agricultural practices like factory farming – that they make the world uglier, that they make non-human animals lack well-being – we can add that they make non-human animals that are noble lack well-being. As noted above, this makes sense of the idea that one reason why factory farming is especially wrong is that “animals are innocents.”

On such a model, the moral implications of (ii) and (iv) are roughly equivalent. Regarding (ii) we have some moral reason to remove brutishness from existence. Where possible, as with human infants or brutish dogs, we use all sorts of techniques of training to do this. Where this is not possible, it seems we have some slight reason to remove brutish animals from existence. This is not to say that we have all-things-considered reason to do so. Rather one might plausibly conclude that the bad brutishness even of Therios is outweighed by the value of good aspects of Therios such as the pleasure they experience, their contribution to biodiversity, and so forth. Regarding (iv)

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we have less moral reason to refrain from practices that cause some non-human animals to lack well-being. This is not to say that (iv) gives us moral reason to engage in these practices. As an intuitive example, I have heard it remarked many times (to paraphrase) that fox hunting is not so wrong given that foxes are vicious, because they have a behavioural-disposition to surplus killing, so-called “hen house syndrome” (Kossak 1989, 510).

With respect to the moral implications of (ii) and (iv) an anonymous referee raises the objection that:

“Domestic cats are disposed to killing birds, mice, and other animals even when they don’t need to do so for food. Many dogs are disposed to kill rabbits and squirrels if given the chance. So, it would follow from [the author’s] views that it is worse to cause cows, pigs, and chickens to suffer than it is to cause cats and dogs to suffer and that it’s worse to kill cows, pigs, and chickens than it is to kill cats and dogs. I suspect that most readers of *Between the Species* will find that result unacceptable.”

I do think that the noted behavioural-dispositions are brutish (granting that empirically cats and dogs have them), but to reach the conclusion that it is worse to cause a cow to suffer than it is to cause a cat or a dog to suffer we would have to form a fuller picture of the behavioural-dispositions of these animals. My golden retriever, Winnow, is inclined to chase squirrels, but she is also very friendly in her behaviour towards other dogs and towards people, which is noble. So, overall, Winnow is not clearly more brutish than a cow that has neither of these behavioural-dispositions, and so Winnow’s lacking well-being

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is not less bad than a cow lacking well-being. I am inclined to happily bite any residue of a bullet. Some vegans feel conflicted about or reject cat guardianship given cat carnivorousness (Clipsham 2017) and cat surplus killing behaviour (Abbate 2020; Fischer 2020). For the most part these feelings seem to be driven by the concern that cat guardians are vicariously responsible for the bad effects that cats cause (the pain of birds, the death of birds). In addition, it seems that (ii) and (iv) play a role here. To take the extreme case, I suspect that most people would not want to become guardians of some Therios. It would be hard to delight in their behaviour, and hard to care about promoting their well-being, and hard to care about avoiding their suffering (things involved in good guardianship), because of how their brutishness informs the value of their well-being.

In closing, I again emphasise that different moral theories will yield different moral implications here. Yet, barring the most extreme views that entirely divorce the right and the good, the axiological claims I have made about nobleness and brutishness will have some moral implications for human practices that affect non-human animals.

End notes

¹An example of the brutish: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Ei9A6F-No0>.

An example of the noble: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3-NRKLGu7qk>.

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