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# MIDGLEY AT THE INTERSECTION OF ANIMAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS

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### Article abstract

This paper explores the intersection of animal and environmental ethics through the thought of Mary Midgley. Midgley's work offers a shift away from liberal individualist animal ethics toward a relational value system involving interdependence, care, sympathy, and other components of morality that were often overlooked or marginalized in hyperrationalist ethics, though which are now more widely recognized. This is most exemplified in her concept of "the mixed community," which gained special attention in J. Baird Callicott's effort to create a "unified environmental ethics." In this, Callicott saw the potential in Midgley's thought for bringing animal and environmental ethics "back together again." However, this paper argues that he oversimplified and misapplied her complex concept. This is primarily due to his attempt to harmonize her approach with a rigid dichotomy between domestic and wild animals—as well as one between individuals and collectives—in his conception of the land ethic in the tradition of Aldo Leopold. Throughout, this paper also highlights Midgley's value as an early contributor to the convergence of animal and environmental ethics.

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# MIDGLEY AT THE INTERSECTION OF ANIMAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS

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## ABSTRACT:

This paper explores the intersection of animal and environmental ethics through the thought of Mary Midgley. Midgley's work offers a shift away from liberal individualist animal ethics toward a relational value system involving interdependence, care, sympathy, and other components of morality that were often overlooked or marginalized in hyperrationalist ethics, though which are now more widely recognized. This is most exemplified in her concept of "the mixed community," which gained special attention in J. Baird Callicott's effort to create a "unified environmental ethics." In this, Callicott saw the potential in Midgley's thought for bringing animal and environmental ethics "back together again." However, this paper argues that he oversimplified and misapplied her complex concept. This is primarily due to his attempt to harmonize her approach with a rigid dichotomy between domestic and wild animals—as well as one between individuals and collectives—in his conception of the land ethic in the tradition of Aldo Leopold. Throughout, this paper also highlights Midgley's value as an early contributor to the convergence of animal and environmental ethics.

## RÉSUMÉ :

Cet article explore l'intersection entre l'éthique animale et l'éthique environnementale par le biais de la pensée de Mary Midgley. Le travail de Midgley prend ses distances d'une éthique animale libérale individualiste pour se rapprocher d'un système de valeurs relationnel qui implique l'interdépendance, le soin (care), la sympathie, et d'autres éléments de la morale qui ont souvent été négligés ou marginalisés dans le contexte de l'éthique hyperrationaliste, bien qu'actuellement plus largement reconnus. Le meilleur exemple de cela se retrouve dans son concept de « la communauté mixte » (the mixed community), lequel a bénéficié d'une attention particulière chez J. Baird Callicott et son effort pour créer une « éthique environnementale unifiée » (unified environmental ethics). En cela, Callicott a vu le potentiel de la pensée de Midgley's pour une « réunification » de l'éthique animale et l'éthique environnementale. Or, cet article soutient qu'il a simplifié et appliqué à tort le concept complexe de Midgley, en raison de sa tentative de concilier l'approche de cette dernière avec une stricte dichotomie entre animaux sauvages et domestiques – en plus d'une autre entre individus et collectivités – suivant sa conception de l'éthique de la terre dans la tradition d'Aldo Leopold. Tout au long du texte, cet article met en relief l'importance de Midgley comme l'une des premiers théoriciens à avoir contribué à la convergence de l'éthique animale et de l'éthique environnementale.

This paper offers an exploration of the value of British philosopher Mary Midgley at the intersection of animal and environmental ethics. I will begin by revisiting one of the most notable episodes of divergence and convergence in animal and environmental ethics in the work of J. Baird Callicott. This will not only help illustrate some of the challenges and divisions in the animal-environment dynamic, but also highlight a prominent application of Midgley's "mixed community" concept—one that attempts to bridge these divisions. Her work in the 1980s was among the earliest English-language contributions to the convergence of animal and environmental ethics, and Callicott sought to utilize her thought in pursuit of a "unified environmental ethics." From here I will look more closely at Midgley's animal ethics while highlighting some of the salient elements of Midgley's thought for convergence in animal and environmental ethics. I will conclude by critiquing Callicott's usage of the mixed community and argue that Midgley's concepts resist being part of his "unified environmental ethics." Though Callicott astutely recognizes Midgley's relevance, he attempts to force her concepts into a system that too rigidly separates domestic and wild animals, as well as individuals and collectives.

## THE DIVERGENCE OF ANIMAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS

Before exploring Mary Midgley's animal thought, it will be helpful to take a look at a particular area of divergence *and* convergence of animal and environmental ethics in the work of J. Baird Callicott. Callicott is not alone in interpreting Midgley's animal and environmental thought.<sup>1</sup> However, I will focus on his utilization for several reasons: (1) it is arguably the most prominent use of Midgley's concepts in English, (2) it is through the arc of this position on the separation and later reunification of the two fields that we can see the appeal of Midgley's concepts, and (3) he ultimately oversimplifies and misapplies her work in pursuit of a "unified environmental ethics." As such, the goal of this emphasis is to clear up certain misconceptions of Midgley's work while situating her concepts within her overarching project on human nature, which conceptualizes the self as a unified whole in social and ecological context.

Callicott's position on the divergence of animal and environmental ethics is outlined in the provocative 1980 essay, "Animal Liberation: A Triangular Affair."<sup>2</sup> The "affair" is composed of three parties—environmental ethics, moral humanism, and animal liberation—each of which, we find out, is opposed to the others. The first division, environmental ethics, is centred on the "biotic community," in which value is accorded to individuals in relation to the whole. The paradigm case here is Aldo Leopold's holistic land ethic, which is characterized by the now-familiar principle of ecological conscience: "A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise."<sup>3</sup> The second division, moral humanism, is the classical liberal individualist tradition that grants *humans alone* moral stand-

ing or value based on qualities or characteristics that individuals do (or do not) possess. The capacity to reason is typically the all-important dividing line in this tradition. The third division, animal liberation, is a movement that seeks moral standing or rights for animals because of their interests, intrinsic value, or related categories or capabilities.

In this characterization, animal liberation and environmental ethics are clearly opposed to moral humanism because of the tradition's recalcitrant refusal to grant moral standing to nonhuman life. However, Callicott argues that, whether they know it or not, animal liberation and environmental ethics are also *opposed to each other*, both theoretically and practically. This is primarily because animal liberation is concerned with individual animals while environmental ethics is concerned with species and ecological collectives or wholes. Rather than radically challenging and transforming moral deliberation, animal liberation employs the same theoretical foundations and approaches of moral humanism by simply extending the scope of moral standing to include animals. That is, the animal liberation movement follows in the modernist tradition, attributing value and rights to animals in a hedonic fashion based on individualist moral criteria, such as sentience (consequently excluding nonsentient nature from moral concern).<sup>4</sup> In this, animal liberation and moral humanism are each "*atomistic*, or distributive in their theory of moral value, while environmental ethics... is *holistic* or collective."<sup>5</sup> Individual value in the land ethic is then "relative, to be assessed in accordance with the particular relation of each to the collective entity which Leopold called 'land.'"<sup>6</sup> Moreover, for ecological holists, the land or biotic community is not an aggregative collection of objects, but rather "a unified system of integrally related parts, as, so to speak, a third-order organic whole."<sup>7</sup> Animal liberation fails to account for value on this level.

In addition to these conflicting theoretical foundations, Callicott is concerned with the failure of animal liberation to make essential divisions between domestic and wild animals. The biggest issue here is ecological. Environmental ethicists "set a very low priority on domestic animals as they very frequently contribute to the erosion of the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic communities into which they have been insinuated."<sup>8</sup> Actual liberation of animals into their natural behaviours and habitats would only accentuate this encroachment and degradation. Moreover, he claims that, since domestic animals are "creations of man" and "living artifacts," to speak of the natural behaviour of domestic animals is analogous to discussing "the natural behavior of tables and chairs." As domestic animals have no wild nature or home, it is "literally meaningless to suggest that they be liberated. It is, to speak in hyperbole, a logical impossibility."<sup>9</sup> Lastly, Callicott is concerned with the equal consideration and/or treatment that animal liberationists demand, specifically in this ecological context. If each animal deserved and received equal consideration, a single invasive animal, such as a mouse or goat, would have the same value as a bald

eagle, wolf, or other native animal whose species has a more established value in relation to the entire ecosystem. Suffice to say, Callicott is not the biggest proponent of domestic animals at this time and regards animal liberationists at theoretical and practical loggerheads with the interests of environmental ethicists. With this divergence established, we can now move on to convergence.

## REUNIFICATION OF ANIMAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS

In his 1988 essay, “Animal Liberation and Environmental Ethics: Back Together Again,” Callicott revises this polarizing stance.<sup>10</sup> In light of the divisiveness of the rift and the overlapping concerns of animal and environmental ethics, he sets out to reunite the two fields with the help of Mary Midgley. He traces the conceptual foundations of the land ethic and argues that Leopold was influenced by Charles Darwin’s science of ethics, David Hume’s sentimentalism, and Charles Elton’s ecological concepts in devising his progressive understanding of the evolution of ethics from individuals to society to the land. He argues that there is theoretical unity among these figures to ensure that any competing ethical claims can be articulated and resolved in the same terms—otherwise moral incommensurability can arise. And further, if animal and environmental ethics are to truly come together, it cannot be through mutual toleration or pluralism—it must be through real unification under one monistic theory.

Callicott proposes that this theoretical challenge might be solved by a combination of communitarian concepts—Aldo Leopold’s biotic community and Mary Midgley’s “mixed community.” He contends that, rather than basing her theory in utilitarianism or deontology, Midgley advances a fundamentally Humean moral theory, placing Midgley and Leopold in a conceptual confluence that results in a “unified animal-environmental ethical theory.” In mixed communities, we have obligations regarding our various relationships: obligations to our families that we do not have to strangers, obligations to our friends that we do not have to strangers, obligations to our pets, obligations to our barnyard animals, and so on. These communities place obligations on us not by intrinsic value or interests *per se*, but rather by kinship, relationships, and community membership. Inclusion in our moral consideration involves perceptions of where the boundaries of our moral communities lie, and these boundaries historically include domestic animals. As such, we feel moral outrage when domestic animals are “depersonalized and mechanized,” not because of individualistic concepts of moral value, but because they are members of our mixed communities.<sup>11</sup>

Callicott concludes that the “Midgley-Leopold biosocial moral theory” bridges the conceptual divides between domestic and wild animals as well as between individualism and holism. This is because “domestic animals are members of the mixed community and ought to enjoy, therefore, all the rights and privileges,

whatever they may turn out to be, attendant upon that membership.”<sup>12</sup> However, wild animals are “*not members* of the mixed community and therefore should not lie on the same spectrum of graded moral standing as family members, neighbors, fellow citizens, fellow human beings, pets, and other domestic animals.”<sup>13</sup> Wild animals are rather members of the “biotic community,” and “the duties and obligations of a biotic community ethic...may, accordingly, be derived from an ecological description of nature—just as our duties and obligations to members of the mixed community can be derived from a description of the mixed community.”<sup>14</sup> Therefore, Midgley’s mixed community applies to domestic animals and Leopold’s biotic community to wild animals. Each community member is valued in relation to the respective whole—mixed or biotic—rather than individually, bringing domestic and wild animals together in a holistic and unified approach.

### MIDGLEY AND THE MIXED COMMUNITY

With Callicott’s utilization of Midgley in place, we can now look more closely at Midgley’s animal ethics in order to draw out some salient features for this convergence, as well as some conclusions on his use of her concepts. Midgley’s project is characterized in her oft-quoted line: “We are not just rather like animals; we *are* animals.”<sup>15</sup> This simple yet vital premise is central to her work on human nature and has important implications for our moral landscape. We are embodied social animals navigating a morally complex world fraught with conflicting values and claims. We also share social and ecological contexts with a multitude of nonhuman animals. For Midgley, this connection with animals and the natural world is often overlooked and neglected, though it should ultimately hold an important place in our discussions of ethics and animals. The concept of the mixed community is an especially valuable description of this context and of our connection with animals.

Much of Midgley’s contribution to animal ethics is in her now-familiar critique of hyperrationalism and in her approach to the role of emotions and relations in morality, which I have discussed elsewhere.<sup>16</sup> However, the more constructive elements of her animal thought give rise to her concept of the mixed community, especially in her exploration of species, relationships, and the boundaries of moral communities. The species barrier, for Midgley, is real and important, and not to be trivialized.<sup>17</sup> *But nor should it be exaggerated.* The species barrier, however real and important, is also semipermeable, allowing for animals of various species and classifications, including humans, to impressively interact and live together. “All human communities have involved animals,” she observes, and it is “one of the special powers and graces of our species not to ignore others, but to draw in, domesticate and live with a great variety of other creatures. No other animal does so on anything like so large a scale.”<sup>18</sup> Such domestication was achieved largely because animals (certain animals, at least) have a shared sociality with us and were, in turn, able to form bonds, understand social signals,

learn to obey particular persons, and so on. These shared traits and behaviours made possible the historical development of complex human-animal communities that extend from our homes to the farthest peripheries of life on earth.

Though animals may not here be “persons” in the strictest sense of the word, as members of the mixed community, they are certainly fellow subjects, not objects. Our intersubjectivity, sympathy, empathy, and shared sociality with animals all underlie a capacity “for attending to, and to some extent understanding, the moods and reactions of other species.”<sup>19</sup> This ability to understand animals, for Midgley, rebuts the Behaviourist insistence that the subjective feelings of animals are imperceptible, indecipherable, or nonexistent. We can, however, talk of the subjective states of animals very much for the same reasons that we can for humans: a range of observable behavioural patterns that can be recognized, a noticeable similarity between nervous systems, and a history of successful interactions built on this recognition of subjectivity that stretches back well beyond domestication.<sup>20</sup> In this context, in which our very language is reflective of our history and coexistence with other animals, most of us are imprinted by interspecies sociality from a young age. We crave animal contact from our youth, and it is a foundational element of our early lives along with song, dance, and play.<sup>21</sup> Bonds with animals work alongside our bonds with people as part of a full human life—and such sociality, with both humans *and* animals, is reflected in the mixed community. Midgley paints a lively image of this mixed-species world:

The species-barrier, imposing though it may look, is rather like one of those tall wire fences whose impressiveness is confined to their upper reaches. To an adult in formal dress, engaged in his official statesmanly interactions, the fence is an insuperable barrier. Down below, where it is full of holes, it presents no obstacle at all. The young of *Homo sapiens*, like those of the other species present, scurry through it all the time. Since all human beings start life as children, this has the quite important consequence that hardly any of us, at heart, sees the social world as an exclusively human one.<sup>22</sup>

In this context, love for animals complements love for humans and the world around us. Midgley likens love to a special substance that need not be hindered by the species barrier: the one “does not need to block another,” she writes, “because love, like compassion, is not a rare fluid to be economized, but a capacity which grows by use.”<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, our sympathy and emotional capacities further encourage an “eager reaching-out to surrounding life and to every striking aspect of the physical world” and undergird “the capacity for widely extended sympathy, for social horizons not limited to one’s familiar group, is certainly part of this childish spontaneity.”<sup>24</sup> This expanded sympathy is a trait that encourages interspecies fascination, interest, and concern, seamlessly binding us to the many animals that populate our world, both near and far. More-

over, this helps us in understanding our broader connection with the natural world. “It carries with it, too,” she expands, “that still wider curiosity, that capacity for interest in other, inanimate surrounding objects—plants and stones, stars, rocks and water—which extends our horizon beyond the social into the ecological, and makes us true citizens of the world.”<sup>25</sup> This leads quite nicely into the convergence of animal and environmental thought in Midgley’s broader relational ethics.

## THE MIXED COMMUNITY AND THE WIDER WORLD

Midgley argues that our conceptions of the self have to make sense in the context of our lives as a particular species on this planet. Individuals exist as whole, unified persons unto themselves, but cannot be abstracted from the wholes of which they are parts. Her perspective on the individual and the whole can be classified as one of relationality and interdependence. The relational aspect simply refers the variety of relationships that one has with the world—with the self, family, friends, community, other animals, and the environment. The interdependent aspect captures the webs of dependencies and interconnections that exist between these various relationships. Here we see the dynamic interactions between the self and the various interrelated collectives in which one is embedded, which she expresses in an organic metaphor:

If... we use a biological or ‘organic’ model, we can talk also of a variety of asymmetrical relations found within a whole. Leaves relate not only to other leaves, but to fruit, twigs, branches, and the whole tree. People appear not only as individuals, but as members of their groups, families, tribes, species, ecosystems and biosphere, and have moral relations, as parts, to these various wholes.<sup>26</sup>

This “wholeness and separateness” is a helpful way of understanding the self in relation to others at the individual, social, and ecological levels in Midgley’s approach.<sup>27</sup> Any explanation of our moral universe in terms that neglect these connections and relations—and their correlative emotions, sympathy, empathy, care, and compassion—will not be comprehensive enough to illuminate the complex variety of obligations that we have to others. This relationality stresses the *interplay* of parts and wholes and, importantly, does not exaggerate either to a fault. Negotiating the complex and shifting dynamics of this individual-collective balance is among the main priorities of our moral deliberations.

In pursuit of a sensible relational approach, Midgley is critical of the tendency in relational thought to overemphasize the principle of nearness or proximity, which can be used to dramatically limit one’s moral boundaries and which can even serve as a form of egoism.<sup>28</sup> This said, she does not dismiss nearness, but embraces the concept in the context of the mixed community. She argues that “the proper way to treat it is to recognize nearness as a perfectly real and impor-

tant factor in our psychology, and therefore in our morality, but to refuse to treat it as the sole or supreme one.”<sup>29</sup> Once again, the answer is not in the extremes but in a balanced appraisal of the values at play. Nearness is a key factor in our moral relations, from self to family to friends, pets, and so on, but there are other claims that can often outweigh those claims nearest to us, such as those of humans and other animals distant from us, in addition to claims from the natural world more broadly. “The moral universe,” she writes, “is not just a system of concentric circles, in which inner claims must always prevail over outer ones.”<sup>30</sup> In fact, Midgley argues that no system of concentric circles or carefully detailed prescriptions can adequately help us fully understand and decide on difficult moral dilemmas. Universalist moral theories that aim to identify a “simple formula” with which one can assess competing priority claims “make the job look simple” and so “can only deceive us.”<sup>31</sup> They tend to portray concern as progressing outward, giving the outer circles less priority than the inner ones. This, Midgley argues, overlooks the relative weight of claims in the outer orbits, which may often be more pressing than those in the inner orbits. Instead, we should work out maps or webs of dynamic, overlapping *types* of claims. This is not to “fix priorities,” but to mark our recognition that “relatively isolated claims” sometimes prevail over those nearer to us.<sup>32</sup>

What develops for Midgley is a comprehensive approach to a wide array of complementary and interrelated ethical issues, in which animals and the environment are not isolated, but rather integrated into a broader framework of our moral deliberation, especially in relation to conceptions of human nature and our place and role in the world. Discussions of animals, domestic and wild, run quite seamlessly into related issues such as sex and gender, science, social justice, economics, and politics. They all are tied together as things that matter to us and are central to our lives. In this relational, pluralistic, and pragmatic approach to the variability of value systems, the parts relate to each other and to the whole, priorities and values shift, social and ecological settings change, and the rules are constantly rewritten. There are no easy answers, and it seems that no single ethical system can account for the diversity and unpredictability of moral issues that arise in these worlds.

### **THE CHALLENGES OF CONVERGENCE IN ANIMAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS**

Now let us return to Callicott and the challenges of finding convergence in animal and environmental ethics. He rightly recognizes many of the issues with which Midgley is concerned, most notably her emphases on sympathy, relations, community, and animal subjectivity. However, there are some issues in plugging the mixed community into a unified system of environmental ethics. Aspects of this system-building dynamic arose in an earlier dispute between Eugene Hargrove and Callicott regarding Midgley’s nonconforming meta-

physics, though I can point toward that critique here only as relevant background.<sup>33</sup> There is also Midgley's general resistance to system building and ethical monism.<sup>34</sup> For present purposes, I'm focusing here on Callicott's use of the mixed community concept, in which he attempts to harmonize Midgley's approach with a rigidly dichotomized understanding of domestic versus wild animals—as well as with a rigidly dichotomized understanding of individuals versus wholes.

Callicott overlooks the fact that our mixed human-animal communities do not necessarily stop at the traditional and often-artificial line between domestic and wild animals. Midgley highlights how varying contexts, relations, and ways of thinking about animals make it difficult to discern this line with certainty.<sup>35</sup> Animals fall all along something of a domestic-wild spectrum or scale based on a number of social, ecological, and conceptual considerations. Dogs, feral cats, squirrels, pigeons, elephants, song birds, chimpanzees, sheep, gerbils, dolphins, and so on constitute such diverse and complex roles and relationships as family members and companions, nuisances, coworkers, symbols, characters, food, trophies, religious objects, research subjects, and so on again. Differing relations, histories, geographies, roles, conceptualizations, and circumstances influence where these animals land on the domestic-wild spectrum. Accordingly, the terms “domestic” and “wild” for Midgley are not helpful as essential categories that preordain the moral status of animals of various types, contexts, and communities.

Midgley does focus on domestic animals in discussing the mixed community, but community, connection, care, empathy, and sympathy do not stop at the domestic-wild borderline, wherever that may fall.<sup>36</sup> Though our domestic context is a good example of the types of communities that can arise in our interactions with animals, the mixed community is more expansive than that. For Midgley, domestication is one aspect of the overarching human-animal community that we are part of, or, the “genuine unity of the whole of beings which are important to each other.”<sup>37</sup> Resisting abstraction, this greater community manifests in particular and concrete ways, both spatially and temporally.<sup>38</sup> Though pragmatic concerns and clashes no doubt arise, these diverse communities transcend the boundaries of domestic and wild, social and ecological. Consequently, as a conceptual tool for envisioning our relationship and responsibilities to animals, the mixed community resists a rigid separation of domestic and wild animals.<sup>39</sup> Though it shades toward the local and domestic, this space is richly populated by a whole range of subjects along with their attendant relational claims.

Midgley's discussion of social and ecological claims is helpful in understanding these distinctions. *Social claims* are those that we respond to in our social communities, claims on behalf of sentient members.<sup>40</sup> The claims of animals are not to be seen as the claims of things, but as social claims of fellow community

members. *Ecological claims* are those we respond to in our ecological communities, claims on behalf of nonsentient members. These include trees, forests, species, collectives, and the biosphere as a whole. We constantly weigh and prioritize these claims in our value systems, which is where we place “what matters to us” in relation to everything else. Social and ecological claims are both important and reflect our unique connection to the whole. And here, for the purposes of convergence in animal and environmental ethics, there is not always a sharp distinction between social and ecological claims. She writes, “Our duties to swarms of very small or distant animals, or to whole species, seem to be partly of the ecological sort, resembling in many ways our duty to plants, but they can also have a social element of response to consciousness.”<sup>41</sup> As such, animals in wild contexts, understood in all their complex situatedness, can have claims on us in ways similar to those of animals in domestic contexts. It is then important to view all within a ranged value system of priorities and claims, in which the social and ecological sorts are sometimes independent, sometimes continuous, and sometimes conflicting. Pragmatically mapping and navigating this moral terrain is more challenging than some ethical systems let on, and Midgley ensures that the complexity of these issues is not lost in animal discourse.

This domestic-wild disjunction connects with a final problem. In his effort to unify Midgley’s and Leopold’s community concepts in a holistic manner, Callicott overlooks the complexity of the relationality in Midgley’s project. He primarily overlooks the individual animals that overlap our mixed social and ecological communities. He seems to retain his earlier focus on the supremacy of the whole and the subordination of individuals.<sup>42</sup> Midgley, on the other hand, has a keen interest in collectives, but stresses the dynamic and balanced interplay of individuals and wholes, as well as the claims therein. In later work, she writes that “concern for the whole and concern for individuals are simply not alternatives. They are complementary, indeed inseparable, aspects of a decent moral problem.”<sup>43</sup> She expands on this, saying, “Neither of them is reducible to the other. It is always possible for the two to conflict, but it is always necessary to try to bring them into harmony.”<sup>44</sup> This interplay again often transcends rigid boundaries—human and animal, domestic and wild, sentient and nonsentient—in our value systems. Many parts of many wholes compose the vast network of interrelations that matter to us and often defy preconceived principles and priorities. Midgley’s approach here is not individualist, as Callicott rightly noticed, but nor is it strictly holist. It is relational with pragmatic and pluralistic elements. As such, though her approach may be complementary to Callicott’s more thoroughly holistic approach, it resists being situated within his unified system.

## CONCLUSION

Though these complications cast doubt on a singular “Midgley-Leopold biosocial moral theory,” I do not contend that Mary Midgley has all the answers. But, as an early contributor to convergence in animal and environmental ethics, her thinking is invaluable in contextualizing human nature in relation to the rich social and ecological worlds in which we are embedded. Through this, she offers us a more balanced approach than the “either/or” choices of liberal individualism and ecological holism in dealing with domestic and wild animals and individuals and wholes. Taken in context, these insights may continue yield compelling insights into the future of convergence, though the answers will likely never be very clean or tidy.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Among the most visible applications of Midgley's animal and environmental thought are Benton, Ted, *Natural Relations: Ecology, Animal Rights & Social Justice*, London, Verso, 1993; Larrère, Catherine and Raphaël Larrère, "Animal Rearing as a Contract," *Journal of Agriculture and Environmental Ethics*, vol. 12, no. 1, 2000, p. 51-58; and Lestel, Dominique, *L'animalité : Essai sur le statut de l'humain*, Optiques: Philosophie 216, Paris, Hatier, 1996. Outside of Callicott and Benton, the bulk of English-language usages of the mixed community are in religious and ecotheological ethics: James M. Gustafson, *Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective*, vols. 1-2, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1983; Lisa Sideris, *Environmental Ethics, Ecological Theology, and Natural Selection*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2003; and Anna L. Peterson, *Being Human*, Berkeley, CA, University of California Press, 2001.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to evaluate every use of Midgley's concepts. However, it should be noted that Larrère and Larrère's use of the mixed-community concept in relation to contractarian ethics is ultimately divergent from Midgley's thought. On the one hand, they highlight aspects of the mixed community that are certainly representative of the concept: interspecies communication and understanding, the history of domestication and sociality between humans and animals, and the relation between collective groups of animals and humans. They also gesture toward Dominique Lestel, a noted interpreter of Midgley, and his line that "the big question is not so much, as we had thought, that of knowing what distinguishes men from animals; it is rather that of inventing ways of living together" (Larrère and Larrère "Animal Rearing as a Contract," p. 57, paraphrasing Dominique Lestel, "Des Animaux-Machines aux machines animales," in Boris Cyrulnik (ed.), *Si Les Lions pouvaient parler—Essais sur la condition animale*, Gallimard, 1998, p. 681-699). However, they (1) maintain Callicott's domestic-wild dichotomy and his general reading of Midgley (as does Sideris, though in a more nuanced form) and (2) rely on a contractarian approach to domestic animals. The first issue will be taken up in this paper and illustrates the impact that Callicott's reading of Midgley had in wider interpretation and application of her work. The latter issue is antithetical to Midgley's thought, as she is critical of contractarianism. As such, a large portion of Midgley's corpus is devoted to undermining elements of contractarian ethics: its individualism, social atomism, exclusivity, and reliance on rationalistic and legalistic categories such as language and consent. Further, Midgley argues that the parameters of the contract are typically unable to extend to animals as they do within human groups. There is consonance here with the critique of Clare Palmer, for instance "The Idea of the Domesticated Animal Contract," *Environmental Values*, vol. 6, no. 4, 1997, p. 411-425.

<sup>2</sup> Callicott, J. Baird, "Animal Liberation: A Triangular Affair," *Environmental Ethics*, vol. 2, 1980, p. 311-338.

<sup>3</sup> Leopold, Aldo, *A Sand County Almanac*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1948, p. 262.

<sup>4</sup> Callicott, "Animal Liberation: A Triangular Affair", p. 318.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 337.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 327.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 321.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 337.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 330.

<sup>10</sup> Callicott, J. Baird, "Animal Liberation and Environmental Ethics: Back Together Again," *Between the Species*, vol. 4, no. 3, 1988, p. 163-169. "A Triangular Affair," along with such articles as Sagoff, Mark, "Animal Liberation and Environmental Ethics: Bad Marriage, Quick Divorce," *Osgoode Hall Law Journal*, vol. 22, no. 2, 1984, p. 297-307, generated controversy and literature from both the animal and environmental perspectives. These are most accessible in collected forms in Donovan, Josephine and Carol J. Adams (eds.), *The Feminist Care Tradition in Animal Ethics*, New York, Columbia, 2007; Hargrove, Eugene C. (ed.), *The Animal Rights/Environmental Ethics Debate: The Environmental Perspective*, Albany, SUNY

Press, 1992; Ouderkirk, Wayne and Jim Hill (eds.), *Land, Value, Community: Callicott and Environmental Philosophy*, Albany, SUNY Press, 2002.

<sup>11</sup> Callicott, “Animal Liberation and Environmental Ethics: Back Together Again,” p. 167.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 167.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 168. Italics mine.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 168.

<sup>15</sup> Midgley, Mary, *Beast and Man: The Roots of Human Nature*, London, Routledge, [1979] 1995, p. xxxiii.

<sup>16</sup> See McElwain, Gregory S., *The Mixed Community*, in Kidd, Ian James and Liz McKinnell (eds.), *Science and the Self: Animals, Evolution, and Ethics: Essays in Honour of Mary Midgley*, London, Routledge, 2016, p. 41-51. Sections of this paper were adapted from this original publication, with permissions from Taylor & Francis. As a rough summary of her critique, let me offer the following. Midgley is critical of rationalist positions that neglect and overlook the care, compassion, and relations that we are capable of and do extend toward others, including other species. Midgley takes aim at the legacy of this “hyperrationalism” and argues that it must be challenged due to the subjugated status it has placed on animals (and, in many cases, certain humans). She interrogates the resulting rationalist categories of morality derived from this position—duty, rights, equality, justice, and contract thinking among others—and their efficacy in dealing with animals. These categories, often misleading and inconsistent due to their technical legal origins, are generally focused on one narrow area of morality and cannot be seen to cover *the whole*, as they are often represented or assumed to do (though, importantly, careful authors often highlight this particularity). In the end, she argues, it is perhaps better to rephrase our discussions of morality because the current parameters may be too limiting to be useful: “Whenever the spotlight picks out a particular moral area like this [rights] as central, things outside it tend to glide unnoticed into the shadows and be forgotten. Terminology, developed for central purposes, becomes unable to express them clearly. In such cases, philosophy must not just record and follow the usage of current theories. It must also be their critic” (Midgley, Mary, *Animals and Why They Matter*, Athens, University of Georgia Press, 1983, p. 63). Reliance on certain rationalist categories of morality, which can be of much use in other areas, can distract from rather than enrich animal discourse, and “notions like equality, rights, and even justice tend to imprison our attention in the area which has now become familiar” (Midgley, *Animals and Why They Matter*, p. 83).

This critique of hyperrationalism should not, however, be taken as antirationalism. For Midgley, reason is crucial to moral thinking and should not be jettisoned. She is certainly critical of those who one-sidedly exaggerate the primacy of reason to the neglect of other important variables in human life and morality, including emotions. Emotions for Midgley comprise a “whole range of our feelings, motives, and sympathies” that support and invigorate our moral faculties and contribute to “well-grounded belief on important subjects.” They are, in other words, “the power-house which keeps the whole lot going” (*ibid.*, p. 35). Our moral concerns and what we care about are very naturally accompanied by feelings—of alarm, disgust, love, joy, worry, and so on—and reflect our sense of the seriousness of the cases, deeply connecting us to what matters in our lives. However, this does not mean, as certain Emotivist theories claim, that morality is nothing but an expression of our emotions. “The Emotivist’s mistake,” she explains, “is in supposing that it [morality] requires nothing else; in trying to detach such feelings from the thoughts that properly belong to them” (*ibid.*, p. 35). Though emotion can be an ugly “buzz word,” it need not be, and is not for her, for whom the “real fault must lie not in the presence of feeling, but in the absence of thought, or in the unsuitability of feeling to thought” (*ibid.*, p. 35). For Midgley, reason and emotion are interwoven and work together in a complementary way as part of the same process.

<sup>17</sup> Midgley argues that those who marginalize *and* those who exaggerate the species barrier are off the mark. In response to those who cast human exceptionalism as speciesism, she argues that the species barrier is real and significant, and that awareness of it is ultimately essential to properly understanding, respecting, and valuing each species and each individual. To do

otherwise is to engage in a form of “patronizing thinking,” flattening out the integrity and distinctions of different animals. Discriminating and distinguishing between animals is not then prejudicial *per se*, but rather an important necessity in appreciating value. Moreover, the drive toward leveled interspecies egalitarianism tends to downplay the important place of *intraspecies* bonds and our relationships as social beings. Her more overriding concern, however, is in challenging those who overexaggerate the species barrier.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 111, p. 112.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 114. Our positive relations in these communities confirm this, but so too do our negative ones. For instance, cruelty indicates a belief in animal pain and an implicit acceptance, not a denial, of their consciousness. In other words, belief in animal sentience is “essential...for exploiting them successfully”—in fact, “exploitation *requires* sympathy” (*ibid.*, p. 114, p. 116). Abuse of and cruelty to animals are unfortunate results of the very real human ability to understand and relate to the “inner” as well as the “outer” states of animals.

<sup>20</sup> This capacity for reading human and animal subjectivity is not always perfectly accurate, and sometimes it fails completely, but the imperfection of this capacity is not a strong enough reason to reject the ability to say anything positive about animals. Here the charge of “anthropomorphism” is quickly made if any attribution of human emotions is transferred onto animals. If things are understood in the context of the mixed community, however, anthropomorphism is wrong only when it *improperly* describes the emotion or feeling; otherwise, it is completely appropriate to refer to corresponding emotions between humans and animals in this language. Given our coevolution with other animals, Midgley wishes to remove the stigma of anthropomorphic language altogether as a red herring: “This attack [of anthropomorphizing] assumes that human language is invented in the first place not only *by* humans, but exclusively *about* humans—to describe them and them alone. Any use of it to describe any other being would then be an ‘extension’—a leap out into the unknown. But if language has, from the start, arisen in a mixed human-animal community and has been adapted to describe all beings whose moods etc. might be of general importance and interest, then that is the proper use of the concepts from the start, and no leap is needed” (*ibid.*, p. 124).

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 118.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 118.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 119.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 119, p. 120.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 120.

<sup>26</sup> Midgley, *Evolution as a Religion: Strange Hopes and Stranger Fears*, London, Routledge, [1985] 2002, p. 178.

<sup>27</sup> The phrase “wholeness and separateness” comes from a later work: Mary Midgley, *The Ethical Primate: Humans, Freedom and Morality*, London, Routledge, 1994, p. 102-103.

<sup>28</sup> Midgley, *Animals and Why They Matter*, p. 21.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22-23.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30. The types of claims are myriad: claims of fellowship, kinship, special need, special responsibility, prudence, gratitude, admiration, wonder, etc.

<sup>33</sup> In Hargrove, “Environmental Ethics without a Metaphysics,” p. 135-49, Eugene Hargrove investigates and critiques Callicott’s use of David Hume, Charles Darwin, Aldo Leopold, and Mary Midgley, the group upon which he builds his unified theory of environmental ethics. Hargrove challenges Callicott’s unified environmental ethics, arguing that Callicott’s theory itself is not as metaphysically unified as he claims. Hargrove argues that, in order for Callicott’s theory to be unified, the metaphysics must be consistent throughout the group in order to avoid the inconsistencies of eclecticism. Hargrove contends that they do not meet this standard, and finds difficulties, inconsistencies, and contradictions amongst the metaphysics of Callicott’s exemplars, including Midgley. The main takeaway revolves around Callicott’s claim that Leopold and Midgley share a Humean system of ethics grounded in

moral sentiments. Though Midgley does have certain affinities with Hume, she is often critical of Hume's overemphasis on feelings in morality and, moreover, does not share his metaphysics. She is, in short, keen on sentiments, but resists Hume's rigid separation of reason and emotion, among other things. In his response to Hargrove's critique, Callicott seems aware of the improbability of finding a thoroughly unified metaphysics, arguing that it is more about the consistency of the main elements involved (Callicott, J. Baird, "My Reply," p. 291-329). Here I will only add that Midgley is more amenable to Darwin than Hume. Though Darwin is influenced by Hume, his account more fully integrates reason into a unified description of morality.

- <sup>34</sup> The following quote captures elements of her affinity with pluralism over monism: "Attempts by moral philosophers in the last few decades to find some single 'moral theory' such as Utilitarianism, which can organize the whole moral scene, have been misguided. They ignore the complexity of life. Of course, we do need to relate our different moral insights as well as possible, and to work continually at bringing them into harmony. But our aims are complex. We are not machines designed for a single purpose, we are many-sided creatures with a full life to live. The ambition of finding a single underlying rationale for all our aims is vacuous... Yet we do indeed need to integrate our aims as far as possible. This difficult two-sided enterprise is now being further obscured by one more irrelevant distortion from academics pugnaciously attacking or defending 'pluralism.' We ought to be through with this kind of thing. We should be asking 'what is pluralism?' or 'what kinds of it are necessary?,' not wasting energy on yet one more polarized squabble" (Midgley, Mary, "Beasts Versus the Biosphere?", *Environmental Values*, vol. 1, no. 2, 1992, p. 116). Though this article was written after "Animal Liberation and Environmental Ethics: Back Together Again," it highlights her usual resistance to monistic theories.
- <sup>35</sup> Others have highlighted the complex and contested boundaries of domestic and wild animals: for example, Clement, Grace, "The Ethic of Care and the Problem of Wild Animals," *Between the Species*, vol. 3, 2003; Palmer, Clare, "What (If Anything) Do We Owe to Wild Animals?", *Between the Species*, vol. 16, no. 1, 2013, p. 15-38; Peterson, Anna L, *Being Animal: Beasts and Boundaries in Nature Ethics*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2013.
- <sup>36</sup> John Hadley recognizes this in Hadley, John, "Critique of Callicott's Biosocial Moral Theory," *Ethics & the Environment*, vol. 12, no. 1, p. 67-78.
- <sup>37</sup> From a series of personal interviews with Midgley between 2011 and 2017. Midgley, Mary, interview by Gregory S. McElwain, March 6, 2011, in Newcastle Upon Tyne, UK.
- <sup>38</sup> She expands on this in 2011: "A wide concept like the mixed community, I think, is naturally going to dissolve into a lot of little ones." She also goes on, importantly, to suggest that the "mixed community" is a conceptual tool and that we should not get too locked into its use: "I use words as and when they seem appropriate. And sometimes one is talking at a very general level, and the abstractions are very important. And sometimes you get nearer to things and other words are needed" (Midgley, Mary, interview by Gregory S. McElwain, May 23, 2012, in Newcastle Upon Tyne, UK).
- <sup>39</sup> Midgley discusses some of these category dynamics in 2012: "The point about wolves, for instance, is that you don't say: 'this one is domestic, this one is wild—so I won't get involved in it, as it were'" (Midgley, Mary, interview by Gregory S. McElwain, May 23, 2012, in Newcastle Upon Tyne, UK).
- <sup>40</sup> She roughly equates "sentience" to consciousness, acknowledging the complications therein.
- <sup>41</sup> Midgley, *Animals and Why They Matter*, p. 90.
- <sup>42</sup> In 2012, Midgley discusses the contribution of Callicott in drawing attention to the importance of ecosystems and holism: "I had Callicott in mind as rather laudable in that he did. He was one of the people who did bring in this notion of the ecosystem as a whole, which is terribly important." However, such emphasis on collectives can drift toward "the whole supreme." Midgley, Mary, interview by Gregory S. McElwain, May 23, 2012, in Newcastle Upon Tyne, UK.
- <sup>43</sup> Midgley, Mary, "Beasts Versus the Biosphere?", p. 117.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 116. Citation of this later work is again for development of Midgley's ideas from *Animals and Why They Matter*. They have no bearing on Callicott's interpretations and serve only to flesh out these concepts as they developed over time and are for the overall purposes of highlighting salient features of Midgley's thought for convergence in individualism and collectivism.