

LETTING ANIMALS OFF THE HOOK

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WHAT KINDS of moral agents are there? Computers and cars are not moral agents. Now imagine you are walking past a playground. The children are agents, but you are reluctant to hold them morally responsible. Likewise, maybe the dogs playing at the park are agents of some sort but not *moral* agents.¹ They are playing by some tacit rules, but those are not moral. The realm of agents is larger than that of moral agents. Only the latter are open to attributions of moral responsibility and reactive attitudes. Parents are morally responsible and can be blameworthy for what happens to their children and their dogs. But if children or dogs fight at the park, they may be reprimanded, not held morally responsible. There are important differences between our responses to children and dogs. For instance, children will normally become moral agents; dogs will not. Children need and dogs need not be brought into scaffolding practices where we hold each other accountable and raise budding agents. The standards we apply to children are sensitive not just to what they are but also to what they are starting to become and the contexts in which they grow up.

Consider cases of nonhuman animals (henceforth “animals”) engaging in prosocial helping. These are anecdotes, but they are numerous enough to warrant consideration, and they illustrate growing evidence collected in laboratory and field settings in various species. On a busy highway in Chile, a dog has been hit by a vehicle and lies unconscious in the middle of the road. Another dog weaves in and out of the traffic and manages to drag the dog to safety.² Chimpanzees will sometimes help conspecifics without any direct benefit to themselves. In a remarkable video shot in Uganda at a busy road crossing, dominant male

1 Agency does not entail moral agency. For recent work on animal agency, see Arruda and Povinelli, “Two Ways of Relating to (and Acting for) Reasons”; Delon, “Animal Agency, Captivity, and Meaning”; Jamieson, “Animal Agency”; Sebo, “Agency and Moral Status”; Thomas, *Animal Ethics and the Autonomous Animal Self*; Wilcox, “Animals and the Agency Account of Moral Status.”

2 Rowlands, *Can Animals Be Moral?* 6.

chimpanzees aid females and youth to cross safely.³ Animals such as apes, elephants, cetaceans, and corvids seem to engage in mourning behavior, expressing curiosity, distress, and perhaps grief around the corpses of conspecifics.⁴ African and Asian elephants are known to manifest concern over distressed or deceased individuals, assisting the ailing and showing a special interest in dead bodies of their kind. Elephants have demonstrated a capacity for empathic understanding through coalition formation, the offering of protection and comfort to others, retrieving and “babysitting” calves, aiding individuals that would otherwise have difficulty moving, and removing foreign objects attached to others. Moreover, helping and empathetic behavior are not restricted to closely related kin.⁵ A female elephant, Grace, was observed trying to help the dying matriarch of another family and distressed when unable to do so effectively.⁶

A growing literature documents animal “proto-morality.” Many primates exhibit “building blocks of morality”: empathy, consolation, conflict resolution, cooperation, and fairness (or inequity aversion).⁷ While animals lack full-blown morality, they manifest behavior that is genuinely prosocial and other regarding. Ethologist Marc Bekoff and philosopher Jessica Pierce have argued that many species can follow moral norms (of empathy, fairness, cooperation, and mutual help) but that such norms are species specific: there is human morality, wolf morality, rat morality, and so on. “Animals are moral agents within the limited context of their own communities.”⁸ Alongside the empirical literature, philosophical work on animal morality has blossomed.⁹

3 Hockings et al., “Road Crossing in Chimpanzees” (discussed in Andrews and Gruen, “Empathy in Other Apes”). For links to the videos, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-HJTG6RRN4E> (dogs); <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f5QopWSeeZc> (chimpanzees).

4 Gruen, “Death as a Social Harm”; King, *How Animals Grieve*; and Monsó and Osuna-Mascaró, “Death Is Common, So Is Understanding It.”

5 Byrne et al., “Do Elephants Show Empathy?”; Douglas-Hamilton et al., “Behavioural Reactions of Elephants towards a Dying and Deceased Matriarch”; and Plotnik and de Waal, “Asian Elephants (*Elephas maximus*) Reassure Others in Distress.”

6 Douglas-Hamilton et al., “Behavioural Reactions of Elephants towards a Dying and Deceased Matriarch.”

7 De Waal, *Primates and Philosophers* and *The Age of Empathy*; and Flack and de Waal, “Any Animal Whatever.”

8 Bekoff and Pierce, *Wild Justice*, 44.

9 Andrews and Gruen, “Empathy in Other Apes”; Back, “Are Animals Moral?”; Behdadi, “A Practice-Focused Case for Animal Moral Agency”; Clement, “Animals and Moral Agency”; Ferrin, “Nonhuman Animals Are Morally Responsible”; Fitzpatrick, “Animal Morality”; Monsó, “Empathy and Morality in Behaviour Readers” and “Morality without Mindreading”; Monsó and Andrews, “Animal Moral Psychologies”; Monsó, Benz-Schwarzburg, and Bremhorst, “Animal Morality”; Monsó and Wrage, “Tactful Animals”; Musschenga,

This paper seeks to refine our conceptual understanding of the animal morality debate. What would it take for animals to be moral agents, for their conduct to have moral worth? Can animals, as Mark Rowlands argues, act for moral reasons? If so, what do we appraise morally—the act, the motivations, the character? I will force a dilemma on the view that animals can act for moral reasons. If they can, resisting their moral responsibility requires more work if we want to preserve an intermediate category of moral subjects: those who act for moral reasons but are not moral agents. We will need fine-grained conceptual distinctions that may weaken the meaning of “acting for moral reasons,” thus undermining the category of moral subjects. Thus, animals are either *less moral* or *more responsible* than many in the animal morality debate argue. I proceed as follows. Section 1 reconstructs Rowlands’s influential theory of animal morality. The reconstruction leads to a dilemma that puts pressure on the demarcation between moral subjects and moral agents (section 2). I draw on what is known as the *Quality of Will* theory of responsibility for a few reasons. Whereas it originally ruled out animals, some theories of animal morality have explicitly appealed to it, and it bears striking similarities to Rowlands’s view. I argue that even theories of animal morality purporting to eschew claims of responsibility face pressure from *Quality of Will*. Section 3 considers two ways of defusing the dilemma and accommodating moral subjects—by claiming that responsibility has different degrees or faces, respectively. I conclude with some optimism about the liberal horn and recommend some revisions to make it more palatable.

1. ANIMAL MORALITY

The inference from prosocial behavior to responsibility is typically blocked by a missing necessary condition: a capacity for deliberation or reflective assessment of motivations, or an understanding of moral concepts.¹⁰ Even arguments that animals could be virtuous stop short of asserting responsibility.¹¹ Commonly accepted grounds of responsibility include an agent’s actions originating in a reasons-responsive mechanism or being the product of self-government or

“Moral Animals and Moral Responsibility”; Rowlands, *Can Animals Be Moral?*; Shapiro, “Moral Agency in Other Animals”; Shupe, “Punishing Moral Animals”; and Vincent, Ring, and Andrews, “Normative Practices of Other Animals.” For earlier arguments, see Clark, *The Nature of the Beast*; DeGrazia, *Taking Animals Seriously*, 199–204; Pluhar, *Beyond Prejudice*, 55; and Sapontzis, *Morals, Reason, and Animals*, 28–33.

10 Korsgaard, “Morality and the Distinctiveness of Human Action”; and Dixon, *Animals, Emotions, and Morality*.

11 Clark, *The Nature of the Beast*; DeGrazia, *Taking Animals Seriously*; and Sapontzis, *Morals, Reason, and Animals*.

conscious deliberation. What matters is that some property demarcates candidates for responsibility from others, even if there exist borderline cases, such as children and psychopaths.

However, the demarcation only holds if moral responsibility does hinge on such features. If there is continuity between animal and human behavior and responsibility does not require conscious deliberation, then what, if anything, blocks the inference? Much of human behavior is automatic, habitual, affective, and opaque and is nonetheless open to moral appraisal.¹² It is then tempting to conclude that animals are open to similar forms of moral appraisal. Thus, work on animal morality suggests that animal behavior may be open to appraisal relative at least to group-specific norms—rules delimiting appropriate behavior within the social group, according to which individuals sometimes evaluate and sanction each other. Even when they do not, we can perform the evaluation.

On the other hand, we could be concerned about the collapse of the demarcation. It is beyond the scope of this paper to argue that seeing animals as morally responsible imposes unfair burdens on them, but let me sketch a rationale. Intuitively, claims about animal morality are not degrading or disrespectful; they do not objectify animals or reinforce prejudices about their inferiority. Quite the opposite. So whence the worry? Elsewhere, I argue that the inductive risk associated with mistakenly attributing morality to other animals is not negligible.¹³ Recent work on methodology in animal cognition focuses on the risks associated with failing to ascribe certain cognitive capacities to other animals.¹⁴ The risk of overattribution is usually considered worse than that of underattribution, but this recent work rightly argues that prioritizing false negatives over false positives is misguided for reasons both scientific and ethical. Both are errors, and the former can have high ethical costs. Still, there are risks to attributing capacities that animals lack.¹⁵ Some studies suggest that attributing morally laden capacities to animals can affect our attitudes. Jared Piazza, Justin Landy, and Geoffrey Goodwin have found that perception of harmfulness (having a harmful as opposed to benevolent disposition relative to human welfare) negatively affects attributions of moral standing,

12 Arpaly, *Unprincipled Virtue*; Cova, “Two Kinds of Moral Competence”; Ferrin, “Good Moral Judgment and Decision-Making without Deliberation” and “Nonhuman Animals Are Morally Responsible”; Musschenga, “Moral Animals and Moral Responsibility”; and Railton, “The Affective Dog and Its Rational Tale.”

13 Delon, “Animal Morality and Epistemic Risks.”

14 Andrews and Huss, “Anthropomorphism, Anthropectomy, and the Null Hypothesis”; Birch, “Animal Sentience and the Precautionary Principle”; and Mikhalevich, “Experiment and Animal Minds.”

15 Birch, “Animal Cognition and Human Values.”

independently of animals' sentience or intelligence. Because "perceiving an animal as having a benevolent disposition enhances people's moral consideration for that animal, which is likely to promote better treatment of it," seeing animals as moral or immoral could have unforeseen consequences.¹⁶ If moral subjects are not just moral patients but deserve distinctive protections and respect, or being able to exercise one's moral abilities is constitutive of flourishing, then it matters how we see them.¹⁷ How work on animal morality can affect our treatment of animals is an open question—can it warrant punishment or third-party intervention? After all, morality has many sides, and not all moral animals play nice—predation, aggression, and callousness are pervasive. Our perception of predators could change if we saw them as moral agents. We might see chimpanzees, dolphins, and orcas as sometimes immoral. Our attitudes to coyotes and even wolves, already considered a nuisance by farmers and the US Fish and Wildlife Service, could deteriorate. Such moral costs must be part of inductive risk assessments. I will thus work on the assumption that the costs of overattributing moral characteristics deserve serious scrutiny. With these caveats in the background, let us look closely at the case for animal morality.

The abovementioned anecdotes, for Rowlands, "form parts of a large and growing body of evidence for the claim that some animals can exhibit moral behavior."¹⁸ Most scientists and philosophers deny that possibility by setting stronger conditions on moral behavior: *X can act morally if and only if X can be morally responsible*, and responsibility requires metacognitive abilities that animals lack. While endorsing a standard, reflective picture of moral responsibility, Rowlands argues, *pace* Korsgaard and Dixon, that animals *can* act for reasons despite lacking metacognition. Animals are "motivated to act by moral reasons, not merely causes . . . where these reasons take the form of emotions with identifiable moral content."¹⁹ We can reconstruct Rowlands's reasoning as follows:

1. To be a moral subject is to be motivated to act by moral considerations, which provide reasons for those actions.
2. Moral considerations can take the form of *morally laden emotions*.
3. An emotion is morally laden if it tracks a moral evaluation or judgment as part of its content.
4. Some emotions in some animals have evaluative content under some plausible description.

16 Piazza, Landy, and Goodwin, "Cruel Nature," 121.

17 Rowlands, *Can Animals Be Moral?* 248–54; and Monsó, Benz-Schwarzburg, and Bremhorst, "Animal Morality."

18 Rowlands, "Moral Subjects," 469.

19 Rowlands, *Can Animals Be Moral?* 35.

5. Therefore, some animals are capable of morally laden emotions (from 3 and 4).
6. Therefore, morally laden emotions provide motivating reasons for animals to act (from 1, 2, and 5).
7. Therefore, animals can be moral subjects.²⁰

A crucial premise (2) is that animals are capable of *morally laden emotions*, intentional states with identifiable moral content such as “This creature’s distress is bad.” Such emotions have two components (3): cognitive (a representation of a state of affairs) and evaluative (an affective valence). Rowlands uses an intricate “tracking” strategy for ascribing content. It consists in using sentences as “*de dicto*” ascriptions of content to ourselves to explain the behavior of animals.²¹ A similar strategy applies to evaluative content. “Emotions, if they are legitimate, track true evaluative propositions, but they do not require that the subject of an emotion entertain, or even be capable of entertaining, such a proposition.²² Animals can experience moral emotions but cannot form moral judgments:

An emotion, *E*, is morally laden if and only if (1) it is an emotion in the intentional, content-involving, sense, (2) there exists a proposition, *p*, which expresses a moral claim, and (3) if *E* is not misguided, then *p* is true.²³

The claim that *E* tracks *p* means that there is a truth-preserving relation between *E* and *p* such that *p* is true whenever *E* is correct.²⁴ Thus, tracking allows us to assess emotions for correctness.²⁵

Suppose Rowlands is correct that emotions involve intentional content such that they can (in)correctly represent. Emotions also motivate. A controversial aspect of Rowlands’s view, granted for the sake of the argument, is his externalism about moral motivation. If emotions are responsive to reasons, they can be motivations that track moral reasons, *even if* the subject does not or cannot entertain such reasons. Responsiveness to reasons is responsiveness to morally relevant objective features of the world, such as suffering or distress.

20 Rowlands, *Can Animals Be Moral?* 33–35. I depart slightly from his four-part “unpacked” argument.

21 Rowlands, *Can Animals Be Moral?* 57.

22 Rowlands, *Can Animals Be Moral?* 67.

23 Rowlands, *Can Animals Be Moral?* 69.

24 For an application of the strategy to care and empathy, see Monsó, “Morality without Mindreading.”

25 One subtle difference: in cognitive tracking, the animal does have a belief; in evaluative tracking, the animal’s emotion simply *tracks* the evaluative proposition.

In sum, emotions constitute morally evaluable motivations if they represent features of the world that happen to be reasons for the animal's conduct and if they are efficacious.

Rowlands argues that some animals can be moral *subjects* even though only human beings are moral *agents*. A "minimal moral subject" meets the following sufficient conditions:

X is a moral subject if *X* possesses (1) a sensitivity to the good- or bad-making features of situations, where (2) this sensitivity can be normatively assessed, and (3) is grounded in the operations of a reliable mechanism (a "moral module")... Moral subjects are ... sensitive to the good- and bad-making features of situations in the sense that they entertain intentional content emotionally.²⁶

In contrast, "the extent to which one is an agent is the extent to which one understands what one is doing, the likely consequences of what one is doing, and how to evaluate those consequences."²⁷ Moral agency and moral subjecthood are "logically independent." Moral agents possess further capacities to understand *that* certain motives and actions are right or wrong and *why*.²⁸ Rowlands concedes that moral agency, being a function of understanding, may come in degrees. Yet animals can be moral agents "to such a small extent that, if we were to think of agency as a categorical matter ... then we would almost certainly say [they are] not an agent at all."

Rowlands's key move is to dissociate moral evaluation and responsibility, making moral subjecthood a "desirable" category, and several authors concur.²⁹ If certain facts or properties can be evaluated morally without presupposing a responsible agent, then animals lacking moral agency may still be open to the evaluation of their behavior or motivations if they are reliably responsive to moral reasons. Remember that reasons need not play a conscious or deliberative role in the animal's mental life.³⁰ The reasons, however, are implicit in

26 Rowlands, *Can Animals Be Moral?* 230–31.

27 Rowlands, *Can Animals Be Moral?* 240.

28 Rowlands, *Can Animals Be Moral?* 243.

29 Rowlands, "Moral Subjects," 471. Cf. Burgis, "Making Covenants with Brute Beasts"; Monsó, "Empathy and Morality in Behaviour Readers" and "Morality without Mindreading"; and Monsó, Benz-Schwarzburg, and Bremhorst. "Animal Morality."

30 For Monsó, Rowlands endorses realism about moral facts ("Empathy and Morality in Behaviour Readers," 676). To me, notwithstanding his commitment to "a reasonably robust sense of ethical objectivity," he is only committed to *reasons externalism* (Rowlands, "Moral Subjects," 472). The good- or bad-making features are independent of "the subjective states of the *agent*." This is different than saying they are mind independent.

the phenomenology of their emotions. Another's distress is experienced as unpleasant and motivates one to engage in affiliative behavior. The badness of distress, and its motivational pull, color the subject's experience of the target's distress.³¹ This makes the presumed "moral module" efficacious.

Consider the Chilean dog again:

His companion lies unconscious on a busy road. This is, let us suppose, a bad-making feature of the situation. The first requirement is that the would-be rescuer is sensitive to this bad-making feature. Such sensitivity does not require that the dog is able to think thoughts such as "This is bad!" The appropriate sensitivity can, in fact, be purchased by other means [e.g., empathetic capacities or response to distress]... Nowhere in this general picture is there any suggestion that the dog has control over his sentiments, still less that he is able to critically scrutinize them.³²

The last bit is crucial. Much of Rowlands' argument consists in burden-shifting, aimed at the scrutiny-control-normativity-motivation (SCNM) schema or nexus.³³ The initial appeal of the idea that morality depends on metacognitive abilities "rests on the fallacy of the miracle-of-the-meta."³⁴ According to SCNM,

the ability to critically scrutinize one's motivations gives one control over them. This control permits these motivations to make a normative claim on their subject, and so makes them the sort of motivations that might be moral.³⁵

Rowlands argues at length that the appeal to control leads to regress and rests on confusion about its role in making motivations normative. His central thesis is that the moral value of an action is logically distinct from the blame- or praiseworthiness of the agent. While the latter requires control and so, perhaps, metacognition, the former does not. Thus, an animal's motivation can be moral without metacognition.

Moral motivations may come cheap, but Rowlands has not argued that responsibility requires metacognition. Nor has he shown that moral subjecthood is not sufficient for responsibility. The dilemma arises from dismantling the SCNM nexus: weakening the conditions for having moral motivations weakens the conditions for responsibility; on the other hand, reinstating stringent conditions on

31 Monsó, "Morality without Mindreading," 351.

32 Rowlands, "Moral Subjects," 473.

33 Rowlands, *Can Animals Be Moral?* chs. 6 and 7, and "Moral Subjects."

34 Rowlands, *Can Animals Be Moral?* 189.

35 Rowlands, "Moral Subjects," 470.

the latter presupposes something like SCNM. It is unclear why a stringent view of responsibility would welcome an entirely separate (“logically independent”) category of moral evaluation. I will return to this possibility in section 3.

Before presenting the dilemma, let us recap. There are moral agents and mere agents. Some mere agents are moral subjects, causally responsible for their actions, not morally responsible, yet capable of acting for moral reasons. The challenge is to prevent sufficient conditions for responsibility from trickling down into our evaluations of moral subjects. As noted, being too liberal with our attributions is risky, so we should be wary of expanding the scope of responsibility without sufficient epistemic and practical reason.

2. ANIMALS ON THE HOOK

2.1. Rowlands’s Dilemma

Rowlands’s argument, when combined with certain views about moral responsibility, entails that some animals can be morally responsible. My argument does not generalize to all theories of responsibility, but its focus is not arbitrary. First, the view I focus on, Quality of Will, bears revealing parallels to Rowlands’s picture of moral motivation. Furthermore, it is a prominent theory, as a quick glance at recent discussions of responsibility responses and reactive attitudes shows. Maybe the best theory of responsibility does not entail that all moral subjects are also moral agents. But since Rowlands does not offer or endorse a positive conception of moral responsibility, the question is open. In any case, we can take the forthcoming argument to be conditional on the plausibility of Quality of Will.

Nomy Arpaly’s influential account of “moral worth” brings the problem into relief. On her account, blameworthiness and praiseworthiness are constitutive of moral responsibility and depend on responsiveness to moral reasons, which is manifested by a depth of concern for what *happens to be* moral rather than what an agent *takes to be* moral. I will consider each of these features shortly. Admittedly, Arpaly does not share Rowlands’s view of animals’ capacity to act for moral reasons. She writes:

Creatures not acting for reasons at all cannot be either morally praiseworthy or morally blameworthy. . . . One cannot blame or praise a creature who cannot be expected to perceive the morally relevant features of situations any more than an elephant can be expected to perceive legal factors, aesthetic factors, or contexts in which a baseball player should not bunt.³⁶

Rowlands would agree. But she also writes:

³⁶ Arpaly, *Unprincipled Virtue*, 131.

The dog's mind presumably cannot grasp—nor can it track, the way even unsophisticated people can—such things as increasing utility, respecting persons, or even friendship. . . . Thus, even if this animal can act for reasons, to some extent, it cannot respond to *moral reasons*, even though it may occasionally come close.³⁷

If animals were responsive to reasons, they could be open to moral praise and blame, but responsiveness to reasons requires a capacity for moral concern, which presupposes conceptual understanding. Importantly, animals are not blame- or praiseworthy according to Arpaly, not because they lack “agent-autonomy,” the capacity to reflect, deliberate, and determine their motives (she denies that responsibility presupposes autonomy), but because acting for moral reasons requires more demanding cognitive capacities than it does according to Rowlands.

For Rowlands, some animals are responsive to moral reasons. They lack “understanding,” but according to his conception of reasons responsiveness and moral content, morally laden emotions are sufficient for moral motivation. If so, some animals are capable of what Arpaly calls “moral concern.” However, if this really is moral concern, then, by the same token, animals are morally responsible. If they are not, then they are not reasons responsive. Both pressures are real. As noted, the empirical evidence for animal proto-morality is growing. The same evidence suggests that, maybe, some animals could be moral agents. Rowlands has only shown that animals can be moral without being responsible *given some disputed theoretical demarcation*. This is not to say the demarcation is unacceptable but simply that the category of moral subject hinges on theoretical commitments. If we lower the standards for moral subjecthood, why not also lower the standards for moral agency?

It is interesting that Rowlands's qualms regarding *human* responsibility surface throughout the book. While claiming that at least most humans but no animals can be moral agents, he seems to think that the standard picture of agency is too demanding even for us. So, if human beings are morally responsible, then maybe we should reconsider our criteria for responsibility. But if we do, we risk collapsing the moral subjecthood/agency distinction. This is *Rowlands's dilemma*:

Liberal Horn: Accept moral subjecthood *and* moral agency for some animals.

Conservative Horn: Deny moral agency for animals *but also* deflate the meaning of moral subjecthood.

³⁷ Arpaly, *Unprincipled Virtue*, 146.

The rest of the paper will motivate each horn and attempt to defuse the dilemma. The next section motivates the liberal horn, which proponents of animal morality should find the most attractive.

2.2. *Quality of Will*

According to Quality of Will,

1. A person is morally responsible for an action when that action expresses her quality of will, that is, her goodwill, ill will, or indifference or lack of concern.
2. Goodwill consists in attitudes such as a desire for the right or the good or a concern for what is morally good or right.³⁸

Importantly, the agent acting with goodwill is responsive to moral reasons *de re*, that is, to what happen to be reasons for the action rather than the fact that it is good; the content of the agent's attitude is not *de dicto* concern for morality.³⁹ Mark Twain's Huckleberry Finn is praised for helping his slave friend Jim escape, even though Huckleberry views himself as flouting what he believes to be the right reasons (property rights, the law). His praiseworthiness derives from his being responsive to moral considerations *de re*. He does the right thing (helping Jim escape) for the right reason (Jim is a friend and a person) but without consciously entertaining this being the right thing as his motivating reason. It is not that he is not deliberating. He is, in fact, torn. But his acting upon the right reasons is not the product of his deliberative process. Had it been, Jim might have concluded he was doing the *wrong* thing!⁴⁰

Rowlands denies that 2 above is a necessary condition for moral evaluation. Animals can have moral motivations even without any understanding of the

38 Arpaly, *Unprincipled Virtue*; McKenna, *Conversation and Responsibility*; and Strawson, "Freedom and Resentment." David Shoemaker distinguishes between three interpretations of "quality of will": *character*, *judgment*, or *regard*, yielding three "noncompeting conceptions of responsibility" and targets for distinct subsets of responsibility responses ("Qualities of Will"). Perhaps some animals exhibit quality of regard since they have affective and cognitive attitudes such as seeing a conspecific as being in distress and to be helped or a companion as worthy of trust and reciprocity.

39 Arpaly, *Unprincipled Virtue*; and Markovits, "Acting for the Right Reasons."

40 In contrast, for Johnson King, Finn's act lacks moral worth because he is *accidentally* doing the right thing; he has no idea that he is performing an act of the right type ("Accidentally Doing the Right Thing"). Rather, he is motivated by the right-making features but does not understand the relationship between those features and the act's rightness. Moral worth requires *deliberately* doing the right thing. As a reviewer notes, this criticism, which would otherwise block the liberal horn of the dilemma, is not compatible with Rowlands's tracking account of moral motivation, since tracking is reliable. According to Johnson King's more demanding view, animals' behavior cannot be moral.

concepts of right or wrong. But while some Quality of Will views do require some such understanding for responsibility, this is not a core commitment. Moral concern is understood *de re* rather than *de dicto*. Insofar as an animal is motivated by what makes an action right, she has the required kind of concern. Moreover, Rowlands's tracking strategy seems specifically designed to allow for such attributions. The relevant moral proposition is implied by an animal's having the relevant moral emotion that does not misfire.

If goodwill does not require autonomy, can animals manifest it? Rowlands's tracking strategy enables the attribution of identifiable moral content to animals. Animals are responsive (*de re*) to features of the environment that our (*de dicto*) attributions identify as morally relevant: he is my buddy, she helped me last time, he is in distress, and so on. Jennifer Lynn Burgis and Asia Ferrin argue that animals can manifest goodwill, thus taking the liberal horn of the dilemma. Burgis specifically argues that some animals can understand morally relevant considerations (*de re*) by Arpaly's lights.⁴¹ Recall the example of Grace the elephant. She was acting for the right reasons in manifesting (*de re*) concern for the welfare of the matriarch, acting upon motivations whose content is responsive to moral considerations. She likely experienced empathy (distress by proxy) and sympathy (other-regarding concern) for a group mate in distress. If such content is sufficient for goodwill, and if autonomous deliberation is not necessary, Grace is responsible according to Quality of Will. To express goodwill is to act for the right reasons, as Grace seems to have done.

Ferrin draws on the empirical literature to argue that empathetic capacities are sufficient for the capacity to act for moral reasons.⁴² Frans de Waal's Russian doll metaphor describes layers of empathy, from (1) state-matching (emotional contagion) at the core to (2) sympathetic concern (consolation) to (3) perspective taking (targeted helping) on the outside.⁴³ Many animals exhibit at least 1, including rodents; many primates at least 2.⁴⁴ Ferrin defends two claims. First, empathy (affective and cognitive) is sufficient for moral action, especially responsiveness to others' states. Second, both affective and cognitive empathy are found to various degrees across species, including apes, cetaceans, and elephants. These animals meet the criteria for manifesting quality of will. Accordingly, their actions can have moral worth.

41 Burgis, "Making Covenants with Brute Beasts," 132.

42 Ferrin, "Nonhuman Animals Are Morally Responsible," 138–42. Also see Ferrin, "Good Moral Judgment and Decision-Making without Deliberation."

43 De Waal, *The Age of Empathy*.

44 On rodents, see Bartal, Decety, and Mason, "Empathy and Pro-social Behavior in Rats."

By the same token, Grace could have *failed* to show proper concern for the matriarch. And if she is morally responsible, she may be blameworthy. Oddly, such an implication is rarely considered. Work on animal morality typically focuses on morally admirable behavior.⁴⁵ While for Rowlands, “praise would be an inappropriate attitude to bear toward [moral subjects],” for Burgis, moral animals are open to praise but not blame.⁴⁶

More generally, there is a widely held praise/blame asymmetry.⁴⁷ Some argue that praise and blame have different control conditions—the ability to do otherwise is a condition of blame but not praise.⁴⁸ One can be blameworthy only if one had alternative possibilities, while one can be praiseworthy even if one did not. Praise merely requires acting for the right reasons; the ability to do otherwise is a more stringent condition. On this view, some animals could meet the conditions for praiseworthiness but not blameworthiness because they lack control-relevant abilities but can still act for the right reasons. Rowlands would agree with the verdict but cannot avail himself of this justification of the asymmetry since he rejects control as a condition of moral evaluation. Moreover, theories of responsibility do not distinguish between moral subjects and moral agents, so it is unclear how these justifications mesh with his view.

A different but related assumption is that a higher bar must be met for blame than praise.⁴⁹ Indeed, the risks of harm are lower in praising than in blaming mistakenly: praise tends to benefit the target; blame tends to harm.⁵⁰ The asymmetry is reinforced by the fact that our access to animals’ motivations is opaque, so we should be charitable about their motivations. This echoes the caution favoring false positives over false negatives in animal research. But these are epistemic and pragmatic considerations that do not bear on whether animals are *worthy* of blame or praise.

A natural thought is that elephants cannot express ill will when failing to help others in distress. Yet one could argue that orcas tormenting baby seals

45 Though see Monsó, “Is Predation Necessarily Amoral?”; Monsó and Wrage, “Tactful Animals”; and Shupe, “Punishing Moral Animals.”

46 Rowlands, *Can Animals Be Moral?* 142; and Burgis, “Making Covenants with Brute Beasts,” 132.

47 For an empirical review, see Anderson, Crockett, and Pizzaro, “A Theory of Moral Praise.”

48 Nelkin, “Responsibility and Rational Abilities”; and Wolf, “Asymmetrical Freedom.”

49 Vilhauer, “Free Will and the Asymmetrical Justifiability of Holding Morally Responsible”; and Wolf, “Asymmetrical Freedom.”

50 Argetsinger, “Blame for Me and Not for Thee”; Mackenzie, “Culpability, Blame, and the Moral Dynamics of Social Power”; McGeer, “Co-reactive Attitudes and the Making of Moral Community”; and Pickard, “Responsibility without Blame” and “Responsibility without Blame for Addiction.”

and chimpanzees brutally killing infant chimps are manifesting what seems like ill will, cruelty, or indifference toward suffering.⁵¹ Still, we usually assume that animals hurting or failing to help others do not manifest such attitudes. Animals are at least excused when their actions fail to express proper concern, either because they lack a crucial capacity or because of their circumstances (e.g., diet, scarcity). And so we admire or praise the nice chimpanzees and let the nasty ones off the hook.

2.3. *Accountability*

Ferrin writes, “though animals are sometimes morally responsible, we may not be able to engage in practices of holding them responsible given the communication barrier and lack of overlapping social context.”⁵² On the other hand, “some animals seem to experience reactive attitudes toward each other such as resentment, indignation, hurt feelings, anger, gratitude, reciprocal love, and forgiveness.” Ferrin suggests that animals are likely responsible to each other (“intraspecies accountability”) but not across species boundaries (“interspecies accountability”). We probably should not *hold* animals responsible; reactive attitudes are only locally applicable by and to group members, even if *we* can recognize that their actions have moral worth. Thus, the recognition of moral subjecthood in other animals may entail intra- but not interspecies responsibility.

Dorna Behdadi takes a different route to the conclusion that some animals, who participate in “moral responsibility practices” (MRPs), are accountable to each other.⁵³ Behdadi’s alternative to “capacity-focused approaches” sees moral agency as “the participation in certain social, inter-relational practices” and argues specifically, from evidence on canine cognition and social play, that canids participate in MRPs and hence are moral agents. According to practice-focused approaches (which overlap with Quality of Will), participants in MRPs “share a strong disposition to internalize norms and to participate in the attitudes, expressions, and practices that surround them.”⁵⁴ Canids are competent participants in canid normative “communicatory practices,” which are “a relevant analog to at least *some* forms of moral exchange in terms of *asking for reasons, explanations, or acknowledgment and responding by providing*

51 Monsó, “Is Predation Necessarily Amoral?”; and Monsó and Wrage, “Tactful Animals.”

52 Ferrin, “Nonhuman Animals Are Morally Responsible,” 146.

53 Behdadi, “A Practice-Focused Case for Animal Moral Agency.”

54 Behdadi, “A Practice-Focused Case for Animal Moral Agency,” 230. For the overlap with Quality of Will, see Strawson, “Freedom and Resentment”; McGeer, “Co-reactive Attitudes and the Making of Moral Community”; McKenna, *Conversation and Responsibility*; and Vargas, *Building Better Beings*.

*explanations, excuses, or acknowledging transgressions.*⁵⁵ Canids can thus be appropriate targets of blame when shared norm communication is possible—when canids are, as a Strawsonian could put it, potential moral interlocutors.⁵⁶ (Indeed, the dispositions and inclinations relevant to MRPs coincide with abilities enabling quality of will. Accordingly, they can adopt something akin to the Strawsonian “participant attitude” to each other.)

Ferrin’s and Behdadi’s views have two implications. First, morality is species specific, and the evaluation of moral subjects is relative to context.⁵⁷ Moral subjects are off the hook relative to us.⁵⁸ By the same token, moral subjects internalize different norms and act for different reasons than we do. We may identify whether and when they act for moral reasons, but our respective spaces of moral reasons may not overlap much. So, we lack standing to adopt the participant attitude toward them. The second implication, however, is that if interspecies communication and sufficient social overlap could be secured, interspecies accountability would make sense. Perhaps our “relations of mutual trust and affection” with companion animals provide such a context.⁵⁹

2.4. *Protecting Moral Subjects*

In sum, we have philosophical and empirical reasons to extend Quality of Will to some animals, but the meaning and scope of these animals’ responsibility remain unclear. My argument turns on the plausibility of Quality of Will, and since Rowlands does not discuss it, I can only surmise what his response would be. Two cases he has offered to maintain the separation between moral motivation and moral responsibility will help.

First, consider the real-life case of Robert Thompson and Jon Venables, two ten-year-old English boys who on February 12, 1993, abducted, tortured, and murdered three-year-old Jamie Bulger. Thompson and Venables became “the youngest convicted murderers in English history.”⁶⁰ As Rowlands notes, “under questioning, they revealed that they had planned to abduct and murder a child that day,” so we presume they acted intentionally and were motivated to inflict suffering and kill. Even though, because of their age, they fell below the threshold of responsibility, Rowlands expects the reader to agree that their motivations were morally evil.

55 Behdadi, “A Practice-Focused Case for Animal Moral Agency,” 236.

56 Watson, “Responsibility and the Limits of Evil.”

57 Bekoff and Pierce, *Wild Justice*.

58 Though see Shupe, “Punishing Moral Animals.”

59 Scanlon, *Moral Dimensions*, 166.

60 Rowlands, “Moral Subjects,” 471.

Unfortunately, Rowlands's only supporting claim is that denying that the boys had morally bad intentions, "if one is not in the grip of a peculiarly warped moral psychology, is as counterintuitive as a claim can get."⁶¹ Let us concede, then, that their motivations were evil. Does it not follow, according to Quality of Will, that they were somewhat morally responsible? They did the wrong thing for the wrong reasons. The question is whether their motivations were morally laden. They clearly manifested a lack of moral concern, but should we expect the boys to manifest such concern? No less but also no more than what we expect of moral subjects. Indeed, for Rowlands, their motivations would be evil even if the boys were mentally ill or under the influence of factors beyond their control. They are moral subjects, open to moral evaluation, but not moral agents. Why not hold them accountable? The condition of their exemption is that they are children, though it is worth noting that according to a Strawsonian view, extreme evil serves as its own exempting condition by placing wrongdoers outside the bounds of the moral community. Gary Watson underscored the ambivalence of extreme evil between antipathy and sympathy, blame and exemption. This could be clouding our intuition regarding the boys.⁶²

A few things cast doubt on the moral status of the boys' motivations, though. First, they were held legally responsible and convicted, presumably partly on account of their motivations. According to Peter Strawson and Watson, children gradually become moral agents even if they lack full moral understanding. This suggests that the subject/agent distinction is porous. If, however, the boys were not responsible, this is because the moral psychology we deploy to explain their behavior discounts the moral status of their motivations. They may be malicious or vicious, and we may justifiably harbor antipathy toward them, but not evidently in a moral sense. Whether such psychology is "warped," as Rowlands says, requires argument. The claim that their motivations are obviously immoral rather than pathological, made in support of the subject/agent distinction, lacks support.

61 Rowlands, "Moral Subjects," 471.

62 In "Responsibility and the Limits of Evil," Watson showed that Strawson's theory implies the paradox that evil counts as its own exemption condition (holding responsible requires moral address, which requires a potential moral interlocutor). On the one hand, we have standing to blame evil wrongdoers; on the other hand, heartless murderers such as Robert Harris do not seem capable of heeding our demands, and so cannot be morally addressed—we lack a shared framework of values. The alternative is to deny (*pace* Strawson) that responsibility requires membership in the moral community. According to Michael McKenna, while Harris is *not* a member of the moral community, he has the *capacity* to participate in it, which explains his responsibility ("The Limits of Evil and the Role of Moral Address"). It is not that he does not understand our values; he repudiates them.

A final point concerns Rowlands's appeal to parity.⁶³ Rowlands takes this sort of case to confirm the logical independence of moral motivation and responsibility. However, why should our attitudes to children carry over to other species? There may be pragmatic reasons to appraise the boys' motivations that will not apply to animals, such as the need for social order, plaintiffs' legal claims, or scaffolding practices of moral education.⁶⁴ We may separate moral evaluation from the fact of holding responsible and yet think that the former is functionally justified by responsibility practices. We turn children into members of the moral community by evaluating their motivations before they can even be held responsible. None of those facts apply to other animals. Hence, even if we concede that the boys' motivations were evil, it does not follow that moral subjecthood applies outside the context at hand.

The second case Rowlands discusses is that of Adolf Hitler in a world of hard determinism, where no one is morally responsible, "which may or may not be the actual world":

We might ... justifiably ... refuse to blame or hold him responsible for what he does. But refusing to classify his motivations as even falling into the category of the moral is highly counterintuitive.⁶⁵

Granted, Hitler's moral motivations are abhorrent even under hard determinism. After all, we can see psychopaths' motivations as vicious while (sometimes) refraining from holding them responsible. But in what sense exactly are deterministic Hitler's motivations of the moral kind? Rowlands implies that determinism precludes control, including over one's motivations, and therefore responsibility, but that those motivations do not presuppose control to be morally appraisable. However, not only is this a controversial claim in the responsibility literature, but rejecting the control condition leads naturally to a view like Quality of Will and therefore the liberal horn of the dilemma. In the above cases, moral responsibility and moral motivation stand or fall together. Such cases make the distinction between moral subjecthood and moral agency intuitively plausible but cannot establish it without further argument. In contrast, Quality of Will has the theoretical virtue of harmonizing our judgments about the cases. Its simplicity is not decisive, but it explains the appearance that Thompson, Venables, and Hitler deserve blame even under circumstances that would normally count as exempting conditions.

63 Rowlands, "Moral Subjects," 473.

64 McGeer, "Co-reactive Attitudes and the Making of Moral Community"; and Vargas, *Building Better Beings*.

65 Rowlands, "Moral Subjects," 471.

To recap, Rowlands's dilemma was either accepting that animals can be morally responsible (the liberal horn) or deflating the import of moral subjecthood (the conservative horn). The dilemma arises from the combination of moral subjecthood with Quality of Will. In the remainder of the paper, I zoom out and lay the groundwork to make the prospect of animal responsibility less threatening. Once we understand what it does not entail, perhaps we will no longer need a subject/agent distinction and could take the liberal horn without worrying.

3. ANIMALS OFF THE HOOK

Each of the two “ways out” I will consider consists in protecting animal morality from the upward pressure of responsibility, or at least its practical implications: degrees of responsibility and aspects or “faces” of responsibility.

3.1. *Off the Hook, First Pass: Degrees of Responsibility*

The idea that responsibility and blameworthiness can be a matter of degree is no longer controversial. Reactive attitudes should be sensitive to the degree to which an agent is responsible (i.e., competent and/or free from coercion or other responsibility-canceling influences) and the degree to which their action expresses the relevant ground of responsibility.

Some authors who have argued that animals can be moral agents have been careful to stress the significance of degrees. David DeGrazia writes, “the range over which a given being is responsible is determined by the range of action possibilities for which the being can understand a rule of conduct, roughly what its point is, the consequences of breaking it, and so on.”⁶⁶ Moreover, because different capacities are involved in its different aspects, agency varies according to which capacities one possesses and to what degree.⁶⁷ Whatever the required competence, it is gradable, and responsibility responses should vary accordingly.⁶⁸

Most accounts of responsibility are amenable to degrees of responsibility. For instance, D. Justin Coates and Philip Swenson propose to amend the reasons-responsiveness account according to how receptive and reactive to reasons an agent is.⁶⁹ Quality of Will can adjust degrees of blameworthiness to the quality of the reasons for which agents act—namely degrees of good or ill will.

66 DeGrazia, *Taking Animals Seriously*, 203n107.

67 DeGrazia, *Taking Animals Seriously*, 204.

68 See, e.g., Shoemaker, “Qualities of Will.”

69 Coates and Swenson, “Reasons-Responsiveness and Degrees of Responsibility”; and Fischer and Ravizza, *Responsibility and Control*.

Blame, praise, resentment, indignation, or gratitude then vary accordingly.⁷⁰ A proponent of animal morality could thus deny that their view entails that animals must be subject to the same attitudes we direct toward moral agents. If animals are just barely competent, and their actions are minimally morally worthy, then their responsibility need not trigger the same responses normal attributions of responsibility do.

Consider affective motivations, a core component of nonreflective and sentimental approaches to animal morality.⁷¹ We can describe their content and appraise their quality in a graded fashion: for example, how much concern for or sensitivity to the distress of others a creature's conduct manifests or how reliably responsive to morally significant situations it is. Thus, even if animals were morally responsible, they might not be very blameworthy or praiseworthy, let alone answerable to us. The range of potential moral worth of their actions may be as limited as the range of their quality of will or reasons responsiveness.

Though attractive, this response will not insulate animals from the outward expression of reactive attitudes. Graded responses are difficult to maintain in practice. People often express reactive attitudes toward beings who should be exempt, such as children and mentally disabled people. We also miscalibrate our responses to people with impaired agency, such as addicts and patients with personality disorders, which is why some advocate for "responsibility without blame."⁷² Sometimes, there are good reasons for holding some reactive attitudes. Strawson distinguishes between the "objective" attitude—in which we predict, manage, or control others—and the "participant" attitude—in which we hold each other to account. And he notes that

parents and others concerned with the care and upbringing of young children ... are dealing with creatures who are potentially and increasingly capable both of holding, and being objects of, the full range of human and moral attitudes but are not yet truly capable of either. The treatment of such creatures must therefore represent a kind of compromise, constantly shifting in one direction, between objectivity of attitude and developed human attitudes.⁷³

70 Tierney, "Quality of Reasons and Degrees of Responsibility."

71 Andrews and Gruen, "Empathy in Other Apes"; de Waal, *The Age of Empathy*; Ferrin, "Nonhuman Animals Are Morally Responsible"; Monsó, "Morality without Mindreading"; Monsó, Benz-Schwarzburg, and Bremhorst, "Animal Morality"; and Rowlands, *Can Animals Be Moral?*

72 Pickard, "Responsibility without Blame" and "Responsibility without Blame for Addiction."

73 Strawson, "Freedom and Resentment," 19.

But because our attitudes are “constantly shifting,” one should expect some involuntary leakage. As with children, so with animals—we might end up blaming moral subjects when we should not. Indeed, moral subjecthood invites us to shed the objective attitude toward animals.

A reply to this concern is that the excesses of our blaming practices are just that—unjustified—and we should seek to correct them by calling for compassion or understanding instead of blame and indignation. For instance, Hanna Pickard argues that we should refrain from blaming drug addicts while keeping them responsible, because it matters for their own sake that we do so.⁷⁴ The difference is that holding animals responsible does not benefit them the way it does people whose agency is impaired; it is not guided by the end of recovery or rehabilitation.

In sum, degrees of responsibility do not dissolve the dilemma. Either animals are moral subjects because they can act for moral reasons, but then they are morally responsible or we will, in practice, be tempted to express some responsibility responses; or animals can only be responsible to a benign degree, but then the content of their motivations is shallower than we might have thought. Can we mitigate the implications of taking the liberal horn of the dilemma by drawing some finer-grained distinctions?

3.2. *Off the Hook, Second Pass: Faces of Responsibility*

Start with a distinction between *being* responsible and *holding* responsible, or between reasons to judge that a creature is responsible and reasons, in practice, to hold them responsible. Angela Smith makes the distinction to argue that our attributions of responsibility should not be sensitive to the same considerations that count for or against responding in certain ways, typically with reactive attitudes, to someone being responsible.⁷⁵ The question of whether a creature is responsible is distinct from whether it would be fair or appropriate to blame her, even if blameworthiness is conceptually tied to responsibility. There is also a difference between judging someone to be blameworthy and expressing blame, let alone punishing.

Taking degrees of responsibility and the distinction between responsibility *judgments* and *responses*, we might avoid the implication that we should express much by way of reactive attitudes toward animals for their morally good or bad deeds. As Watson notes, “holding people responsible . . . also involves a social setting in which we demand (require) certain conduct from one another and

74 Pickard, “Responsibility without Blame for Addiction.”

75 Smith, “On Being Responsible and Holding Responsible.”

respond adversely to one another's failures to comply with these demands."⁷⁶ Since Strawson, the moral responsibility literature has echoed the idea that responsibility responses presuppose a capacity to participate in interpersonal relationships and the moral community.⁷⁷ If animals are not implicated in this social setting, then we need not hold them responsible, even if they are. Remember the emphasis on intraspecies accountability by Behdadi, Bekoff and Pierce, and Ferrin. Rowlands might argue that the objectivity of the moral facts that moral subjects are tracking allows us to appraise moral subjects even without a shared social setting. It is also plausible that the shared-social-setting requirement applies to responsibility but not subjecthood. Either way, more needs to be said about the ethical standards that should inform our appraisal of animals of different species.

Consider another helpful distinction between *attributability* and *accountability*. Attributability reflects what Watson calls the aretaic face of responsibility (from the Greek *arete*, meaning excellence), whereas accountability (to others) involves reactive attitudes, holding responsible, which implies believing and acting as if the responsible person is accountable to us or others.⁷⁸

Suppose (*pace* Watson) that we can engage in the aretaic appraisal of animals, morally appreciating their character, their excellences and defects, their virtues and vices. This implies judging them as the authors of their conduct—that their actions are attributable to them. A dog could be foolish or courageous, and it could be appropriate for us to express our approval or disapproval of their behavior but not appropriate to hold them responsible—to *demand* that they answer to us or the moral community. For, as Watson explains, the intelligibility of demanding presumes the interlocutor's understanding. The reactive attitudes are "incipiently forms of communication" or "moral address." But young children and animals are incapable, the argument goes, of understanding "the basic demand."⁷⁹

Thus, the dog's conduct could reflect well or poorly on them, they could be a moral subject, but we may not infer that they are responsible—praiseworthy or blameworthy—for their conduct. The distinction could honor the distinct category of moral subjects. The question is, again, whether we can maintain, in practice, a clear demarcation between those different kinds of judgments.

Watson draws a clear line. He denies that animals are susceptible to "aretaic appraisal," which applies to "one's purposes, ends, choices, concerns, cares,

76 Watson, "Two Faces of Responsibility," 229.

77 McKenna, *Conversation and Responsibility*.

78 Watson, "Two Faces of Responsibility," 231.

79 Watson, "Responsibility and the Limits of Evil."

attachments, and commitments” and hence “presupposes moral capacity, the capacity for adopting and pursuing ends.”⁸⁰ John Martin Fischer and Neal A. Tognazzini, in their own “physiognomy of responsibility,” concur: “By asking whether the agent is open to, or is a ‘sensible target’ of, aretaic appraisal, we are asking whether the agent exercised the capacities required to make the agent *the sort of creature whom it might make sense to appraise aretaically*,” which excludes dogs. A dog’s “viciousness” is not moral viciousness and not attributable to her, because she cannot intend to hurt or manifest a lack of moral concern for others, unlike “certain psychopaths, who can indeed have specifically moral intentions.”⁸¹

There is, however, evidence that chimpanzees, orcas, and bottlenose dolphins can intentionally hurt each other, perhaps manifesting negative moral emotions such as cruelty, envy, or resentment.⁸² If Rowlands is correct, moral subjects possess the required capacities. They are capable of flexible, intentional behavior and moral emotions that reliably track morally relevant features of situations. If so, we should accommodate nonhuman moral subjects within our “physiognomy of responsibility.”

It is plausible that humans and animals are exempt on different grounds—psychopaths because they cannot respond to moral reasons, although their actions are still “attributable to them in an aretaic sense”; animals because they cannot entertain moral reasons.⁸³ Unlike psychopaths, and perhaps like children, moral subjects’ conduct and motivations are presumed to be *responsive to reasons*.⁸⁴ We can, using Rowlands’s tracking strategy, reconstruct rational standards for moral subjects’ conduct. In contrast, psychopaths can cognitively grasp moral reasons but fail to properly respond to them. This reveals a tension: psychopaths could be appraised aretaically, but animals could not, even though animals can respond to moral reasons.

More plausibly, barring excuses or justification, moral subjecthood gives us standing to hold, if not express, some reactive attitudes toward some animals. Moral subjects should earn from us more than the objective stance of the

80 Watson, “Two Faces of Responsibility,” 244–45.

81 Fischer and Tognazzini, “The Physiognomy of Responsibility,” 384. Cf. Wolf, *Freedom within Reason*, 63.

82 Monsó and Wrage, “Tactful Animals,” 16–17.

83 Fischer and Tognazzini, “The Physiognomy of Responsibility,” 387.

84 Does the dilemma also apply to children? Are they either less moral or more responsible than we think? If young children can act for moral reasons, then we can draw the distinctions discussed above or say that children are at least partially responsible. We could also take one horn (conservative) for animals and another for children (liberal). Either way, we may need to recalibrate our attitudes if moral subjecthood is how we operationalize our evaluations of children and animals.

ethologist yet less than the participant stance of ordinary responsibility practices. If our responses are likely to misfire, moral subjecthood calls for revisions to our responsibility model. Still, moral subjects *are* responsible in some sense (aretaic attributability). One could also endorse a practice-based, agency cultivation model of responsibility in which animals play no part, but even those views presuppose a quality-of-will account of blame.⁸⁵ And if our practices purport to nurture and develop responsible agents, the question becomes what we should make of moral subjects. Our ordinary practices involve different but pervasive kinds of interspecies interactions, from companion animals to currently and formerly farmed animals to animals in the wild. We cannot just assume that no context gives rise to responsibility responses. As Vargas notes, “distinct forms of acculturation provide agents with differential capacities to recognize and respond to moral considerations in different contexts.”⁸⁶ The question then becomes one of “moral ecology”:

Once we look beyond intrinsic features of agents to the wider set of relations that structure the various capacities of interest to us, we find that moral ecology matters. . . . The circumstances that support and enable exercises of agency in ways that respect and reflect a concern for morality.⁸⁷

Before concluding, I would like to briefly consider a final way to avert the dilemma. Recent work on normativity suggests that several species of primates possess normative competence.⁸⁸ The range of norms includes norms of obedience, reciprocity, care, social responsibility, and solidarity of various forms. In chimpanzees, norm compliance is not external and accidental but is internalized and rests on norm-sensitive motivations. The evidence is growing more generally that normative behavior extends far beyond apes, cetaceans, and elephants to canids, corvids, and rodents.⁸⁹ This literature suggests that (some) animals respond to normative reasons, but it also offers an alternative: animals could be *normative* without being *moral*. If animals can respond to norms, and their motivations form part of their excellences, they may qualify for nonmoral

85 McGeer, “Co-reactive Attitudes and the Making of Moral Community”; and Vargas, *Building Better Beings*.

86 Vargas, *Building Better Beings*, 245.

87 Vargas, *Building Better Beings*, 246.

88 Andrews, “Naïve Normativity”; Fitzpatrick, “Chimpanzee Normativity”; Monsó and Andrews, “Animal Moral Psychologies”; and Vincent, Ring, and Andrews, “Normative Practices of Other Animals.”

89 Monsó and Andrews, “Animal Moral Psychologies”; Monsó, “Morality without Mindreading”; and Monsó and Wrage, “Tactful Animals.”

aretaic appraisal. This would involve replacing the category of moral subjects with that of normative animals.

These various replies defuse, to an extent, concerns about the liberal horn of the dilemma. I started writing this article inclined to see these replies as making ad hoc distinctions against a backdrop of continuity between humans and other animals that motivated moral subjecthood. I am now inclined to embrace them. After all, theorists of responsibility believe that different senses of responsibility track important facts about responsibility. We could avail ourselves of these distinctions and conclude that according to Quality of Will, animals can be apt targets of aretaic appraisal but should not be held accountable for their actions. And perhaps that is how it should be. Aretaic appraisals are less burdensome than accountability and seem less morally risky. If that is how it should be, then we might defuse the liberal horn of the dilemma after all. And we could do this while granting my working assumption that responsibility is burdensome. A broader concern about our psychology subsists, though: we often shift within the multifarious physiognomy of responsibility unwittingly, especially when our norms are ill defined, as they are with animals. Deep facts about responsibility notwithstanding, we should tread carefully when it comes to moral subjecthood.

4. CONCLUSION

Knowing whether animals can be moral agents is morally important: moral agents have interests in exercising their moral agency and may have obligations. Some argue that there is a middle ground between mere agency and moral agency: moral subjects, who can act for moral reasons without being morally responsible. Others argue that animals can be responsible but only within their communities. I have put pressure on both views to generate a dilemma: on the liberal horn, the demarcation between moral subjecthood and responsibility dissipates; on the conservative horn, insulating animals from responsibility deflates the significance of moral subjecthood. By drawing finer-grained distinctions, I have sketched a few ways to let animals off the hook—praise and blame asymmetry, degrees and faces of responsibility, and normativity without morality—to clarify the possibilities and identify areas where more conceptual work is needed. Whether or not animals are moral, we owe them credit where it is due, but only there.⁹⁰

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