



Moral Difference and Moral Differences

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Abstract

The idea that human beings have a distinct moral worth—a moral significance over and above any moral worth, such as that may be, possessed by other animals—has a long history and has traditionally been taken for granted by philosophers and theologians. However, in a variety of quarters in recent philosophy, this idea has come into disrepute, seeming to indicate a mere prejudice in favour of our own species. For example, Peter Singer has argued that such a position is mere speciesism, a prejudice of a kind with racism and sexism in that it involves making moral distinctions between our own and other species that cannot be morally justified. What on such views is needed to justify any such distinction is a difference in terms of the morally relevant properties possessed by our own species as compared with other species. I will call this view the moral property view. Insofar as other species share with us morally relevant properties, for example the capacity to suffer cognitive ability and so on, it is mere prejudice not to accept moral requirements with respect to them as we do with respect to our own species. While on the surface such a view may seem morally enlightened, it indicates what will seem to many problematic moral judgments with respect to severely disabled human beings. In this paper, I will respond to these concerns by suggesting a different basis for the idea of human moral distinctiveness, one that draws on recent work by Wittgensteinian moral philosophers and which denies what I called above the property view. According to this view, while our shared life with other animals involves the recognition of their moral significance, our shared life with other human beings involves recognising that human beings as human beings have a distinctive moral value.

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The idea that human beings have a distinct moral worth—a moral significance over and above any moral worth possessed by other animals—has a long history. The idea was central to the traditional Christian world view of human beings created

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in God's image, but it is older still than that. As Bernard Williams has noted in a posthumously published chapter I will be considering, the idea 'goes back at least to Plato, that humans have fewer natural advantages... than other animals, but... are more than compensated for this by the gifts of reason and cognition' (Williams, 2006, p. 136). The idea that reason is the marker of our unique moral worth, in fact as our possessing the only thing in the world that is unconditionally good, was the view defended by Kant. But the question at this point, and which Kant's way of putting the matter prompts, is what do we mean by reason? Do we mean *human* reason, or rather something that does not depend upon the details of our distinctively human way of life. If the latter, which was Kant's view, then a possibility opens up that our human point of view might not be fully rational. It is at this point then that we might question the idea that the mere fact that one is a human being bestows on us a distinct value. That is, one might see such views as indicating a kind of prejudice in favour of our own species. It is with such views I will be largely concerned in this paper. While I will in the end defend a version of the moral distinctiveness of human beings, I will argue that the differences that have been seen to many philosophers to be at issue with the supposed distinctiveness of human beings gets the matter wrong, and that this applies both for some of those who defend human moral distinctiveness and those who oppose that view.

According to an influential argument against the idea that human beings *merely because they are human beings* have a distinctive moral worth, to favour our own species in this way is a moral failing akin to racism or sexism. The name of this particular moral failing is then taken to be speciesism. The general idea is that we favour our own species above other animals, just as the sexist or the racist favours their own sex or race, for reasons that are arbitrary. On such a view, it is arbitrary to morally single out for special regard human beings merely because they are human beings. What is required is a moral reason for such differential regard, and that is then taken to depend on appeal to some morally relevant property possessed by human beings that is not possessed, or not possessed to the same degree, by other animals. The positive moral view that is expressed here has been called moral individualism, where of course the individuals in question are obviously not restricted to human beings. Defenders of this positive view, those that argue that speciesism is a moral failing, include utilitarians like Peter Singer but also many others with somewhat differing theoretical views including Jeff McMahan and before him James Rachels. According to this view, concerning our treatment of any individual, what matters morally, what justifies our treatment or renders it morally wrong, is simply the particular morally relevant characteristics or properties possessed by that individual. Various thinkers will name a number of such properties, including capacity for pain and suffering, having interests, cognitive capacity and so on. The crucial point, as Rachels has put it, is that 'if we think it is wrong to treat a human being in a certain way, because the human being has certain characteristics, and a particular non-human animal also has those characteristics, then consistency requires that we also object to treating the non-human in that way.' (Rachels, 1990, p. 175). For the remainder of this paper, I will refer to this general view as the 'property view'.

Against such views, others have questioned the supposed analogy between, on the one hand, accepted moral failings like racism and sexism and, on the other, the

supposed failing of speciesism. So, for example, Bernard Williams has argued that with respect to racism and sexism ‘something which at least seemed relevant to the matter at hand – job opportunities, the franchise, or whatever it might be – would... be brought out, about the supposed intellectual and moral weakness of blacks or women. ... [but] they were... very bad reasons, both because they were untrue and because they were the products of false consciousness.’ (Williams, 2006, p 140). But speciesism is different because “‘it’s a human being” does seem to operate as a reason, but it does not seem to be helped out by some further reach of supposedly more relevant reasons, of the kind which in the other cases of prejudice turned out to be rationalizations.’ (*Ibid*). That an individual is a human being then just seems in itself a reason to treat that individual a certain way, a reason that does not depend on further reasons at all. We might of course ask: why? Williams spells out the difference between these two kinds of prejudices as follows:

Oppressed human groups come of age in the search for emancipation when they speak for themselves, and no longer through reforming members of the oppressive group, but animals will never come of age; human beings will always act as their trustees. ... in our relation to them the only moral question for us is how we should *treat* them. (*Ibid*, p. 141)

While there is much I agree with in Williams’s critique of the idea of speciesism, I do not think what he says above can be quite right. There are two general points I would make here. First, if one puts the view the way Williams does above, then the very idea that we stand in *moral* relations with other animals can seem slightly odd; at least, there can be in the relevant moral sense no *mutual* recognition here, only enlightened benefactors (us) and dumb beneficiaries (them). I would think that almost anyone who has lived with other animals, say as with pets or working animals like sheep dogs and the like, might wonder about that claim; so, they might reply that there is all the same some sense in which we share a life with animals. But, as I will argue, it is a mistake to think therefore that our moral relations with other animals are ultimately grounded in some idea of the morally relevant properties they possess, that our treatment of them is to (or even can) be justified by reference to such properties. Second, and as Cora Diamond has pointed out, ‘Williams does not give adequate attention to the category of human beings who lack the characteristics that most human beings have (where this category would include human beings who cannot participate in discussion of how they should be treated).’ (Diamond, 2018, p 383). Thus, for some severely mentally disabled human beings like other animals, ‘the only moral question for us is how we *treat* them.’ Taking these two points together then, I will argue for a different way of understanding the moral differences between human beings and other animals. The property view, I will argue, gets wrong both the ground of the differences between human beings and animals and our shared moral life with them, and the ground for our shared moral life with all human beings including severely mentally disabled human beings.¹

¹ For related critiques of the property view, see Crary (2016), Gaita (2002), Mulhall (2002), and Diamond (1995).

To begin, I want to focus not on relevant moral properties that may be possessed by (ordinary) human beings and (some) animals, but on the idea of our shared fellowship on the one hand with human beings and, on the other, with animals. The first thing to note is that the idea of fellowship is relational, where what is at issue is, on the one hand, the kind of fellowship we share with other human beings, and, on the other, the kind of fellowship we share with other animals. Now the question of what that fellowship amounts to cannot be answered outside of our relations with human beings or other animals. To recognise another as a fellow in the relevant sense is to recognise yourself as standing in a certain relation to them. What I will be concerned with in this paper is to understand what such fellowship in each case might amount to, and I will suggest that our fellowship with just any other human being and thus our moral relationship with them is radically different from our fellowship with other animals and our moral relationships with them. In this, I will reference arguments made elsewhere by both me and other philosophers that draw on certain ideas in Wittgenstein's later philosophy. The arguments in question, which I will outline, have been widely misunderstood. The central misunderstanding, as our critics take it, concerns our perceived failure to provide a justification or ground for the moral regard in which we hold human beings, and the differing regard, as I have just indicated, in which we hold other animals. A central question for our critics is how we are to ground the higher moral regard in which we hold all human beings including even the most severely mentally disabled given that the most severely mentally disabled have comparable or even lesser mental capacities (those capacities according to the property view taken relevant to moral standing) than certain animals. So, Jeff McMahan has argued as follows in response to Stephen Mulhall and Eva Kittay, who he takes to be representative of the kind of Wittgensteinian view I am defending.²

Both Mulhall and Kittay are concerned to explain why radically cognitively impaired human beings matter more than animals with comparable psychological capacities. The considerations to which they appeal are essentially relational. Because the radically cognitively impaired share in our common life and are therefore *our* fellow creatures, they make a claim on *us*. (McMahan, 2006, p. 363)

But as he goes on, 'the forms of life [such philosophers] describe do not include the radically cognitively impaired. Those human beings do not, and cannot, share our language, culture, ways of knowing, and so on, any more than animals can.' (*Ibid*). It is here that the misunderstanding lies. On the view of fellowship I defend, this does not depend on any property possessed by parties to such fellowship, including the kind of relational properties McMahan alludes to. According to the view I will outline, it is not as if I first recognise some property (relational or otherwise) and take that as a reason for treating all human beings differently to animals. Rather,

² As Ylva Gustafson has pointed out to me, while Kittay is sympathetic to the kind of Wittgensteinian argument concerning our fellowship with human beings and animals, her own arguments in defense of the moral status of the severely mentally *disabled* are not in fact Wittgensteinian. See Kittay (2005).

our conception of what it is to be a human being, and the more significance that that entails, is grounded in the ways in which we respond to any human being as distinct from other animals *prior* to any such attempt at justification. Similarly, our moral relations with other animals are likewise grounded in the ways in which we respond to *them*, and to an extent in how they respond to us, prior to any thoughts we might have about the morally relevant properties they might possess.

The view I suggested above obviously needs some explaining. What I want to draw attention to is how our moral relations with both human beings and animals, and in particular our sense of fellowship with other humans and animals, are grounded ultimately in a certain natural and primitive responsiveness to them that is not mediated by reflection on any morally relevant facts, including facts about relevant capacities, about them. This is a point I have considered at length in other places,³ and of particular relevance to those considerations are certain ideas in the later work of Ludwig Wittgenstein, and most notably certain remarks from his *Philosophical Investigations (PI)* in what has been called the private language argument. There, Wittgenstein is aware that he will be accused of being a behaviourist, since he claims that there is nothing behind our expressions of mental contents such as pain. As his interlocutor protests, when someone says that they are in pain we must believe in something behind that expression. To which Wittgenstein replies as follows:

I tell someone I am in pain. His attitude to me will then be one of belief; disbelief, suspicion; and so on.

Let us assume he says: 'It is not so bad.' – Doesn't that prove that he believes in something behind the outward expression of pain? – His attitude is a proof of his attitude. Imagine not merely the words 'I am in pain' but also the answer 'It's not so bad' replaced by instinctive noises and gestures. (Wittgenstein, 1958, §310)

What is important here is Wittgenstein characterising belief as an attitude understood as something that could be replaced by 'instinctive noises and gestures'. It may be protested that that cannot be right; is not belief here belief in *something*, that something being the pain as opposed to the expression of pain?⁴ After all, the expression could be an exaggeration, even a feigning, of being in pain. Hence, for example, Wittgenstein's remark, 'it is not too bad', that follows. Surely, as Wittgenstein's interlocutor goes on, this proves that there is something behind the expression of pain, the thing that we believe is present, to which Wittgenstein replies curiously that 'His attitude is a proof of his attitude' and that we should imagine 'not merely the words "I am in pain" but also the answer "It's not so bad" replaced by instinctive

³ See here Taylor (2019) and (2020).

⁴ Of course, analytic philosophers talk of belief as a kind of attitude, a propositional attitude. But that means for them taking a stance or having an opinion about a proposition or state of affairs. Obviously, that is not what Wittgenstein means by an attitude in this connection. As he means it, an attitude is kind of primitive responsiveness to a human being that is *prior to having any opinion about some thing in relation to them*, for example an opinion about the thing we want to call their pain. As I say, Wittgenstein's point is that is misleading to talk here of some *thing* we want to call their pain.

noises and gestures'. How is any of this an answer to his interlocutor? Consider what Wittgenstein says in a similar vein in *Zettel*:

It is a help to remember that it is a primitive reaction to tend, to treat, the part that hurts when someone else is in pain; and not merely when oneself is – and so to pay attention to other people's pain-behaviour

But what is the word 'primitive' meant to say here? Presumably that this sort of behaviour is *pre-linguistic*: that a language-game is based *on* it, that it is a prototype of a way of thinking and not the result of thought

...

My relation to the appearances here is part of my concept. (Wittgenstein, 1967, §540-43)

The point of the last sentence of §310 and the quote above from *Zettel* are then to remind us of how the meaning of our verbal expression of pain and our belief, disbelief and so on in another's pain is connected to, and dependent upon, what he calls certain primitive or instinctive reactions which can in certain cases *replace* those verbal expressions. But these reactions are not *merely* indistinctive, as he says they are primitive in the sense of prior to, and providing the ground for, the way we think and talk of other human beings. The instinctive expressions and reactions that Wittgenstein alludes to then provide for us a kind of framework for our thought in this area: in Wittgenstein's words, we can think of this as a 'prototype of a way of thinking'. This is not to deny that we can have all sorts of thoughts about another's pain, or our own, or even that we cannot question our particular primitive reactions to other human beings' expression of pain on occasion. But it *is* to point out the structure that underlies this, that which is not the result of thought or reflection about mental content, but which determines the way, the lines along which our thought here proceeds. The important point is that insofar as such primitive expressions and reactions are a prototype of a kind of way of thinking *they cannot be justified in such thought*, which is of course just the sort of justification that McMahan and other critics of the view I am outlining expect us to provide. These natural kinds of expressions and reactions taken as a whole cannot be justified then because such expressions and reactions partially constitute the very concepts that are at issue here. As Wittgenstein says, 'My relation to the appearances is part of my concept'. In short, we understand what it is to be a human being, which includes our understanding importantly of what it is to suffer as a human being, in virtue of such natural expressions and reactions.

According to this view, we need to understand what it is to share a life with other human beings very differently to the way McMahan proposes, for our natural responsiveness to human beings, including severely mentally disabled human beings, is not mediated by the kind of reflections on their mental capacities that McMahan has in mind. On the contrary, as I say, our responses are themselves partially constitutive of concepts involved in any such reflection. The point I am making here can be further explained if we consider the fact that McMahan finds it puzzling that we might think that radically mentally disabled humans suffer a misfortune. As he says, 'Why should we think that their having limited cognitive capacities is a grave misfortune when it is not a misfortune for an animal to have capacities of roughly the same

level?’ (McMahan, 2005, p. 366). In answer to this, I suggest our understanding of the fate of such individuals as being a misfortune is grounded in the fact that we might pity them in a way that we would not pity a dog with the same mental capacities. That such a human being is an appropriate object of this natural, as Wittgenstein says primitive, responsiveness helps constitute our understanding of the very particular harm they have suffered. But pity is a form of primitive responsiveness that we have *in such a case* to human beings but not to dogs. It goes without saying that such a human being is an object of pity, that they have suffered a harm, whereas if someone pitied a dog with the same mental capacity that by itself would make no sense for us. That, of course, will not satisfy McMahan who would presumably reply that our pity here is not justified. My general point though, thinking of *PI* §310, is that while our expression of our feelings, such as pain, and expressive responses to such expressions can be questioned on occasion, taken as a whole, such expressions and responses provide the underlying structure of our thought concerning what it is to be human, what human life is like. If one wants to reply that we need to be able to justify *all of that*, then of course we need to reflect on all that we take for granted in such expressions and responsiveness towards others and consider to what extent we could make sense of others if we were to leave all that we take for granted here to one side until such justification was provided. In other words, in order to understand the significance of such primitive expressions and responses to our conception of human life, we need to consider what it would be like if it were entirely absent. So, consider the following passage, again from *Zettel*:

Imagine that the people of a tribe were brought up from early youth to give no expression of feeling *of any kind*. They find it childish, something to be got rid of.... ‘Pain’ is not spoken of... If anyone complains he is ridiculed or punished.

[...]

... here life would run on differently.—What interests us would not interest them.

[...]

‘These men would have nothing human about them.’ Why?—we could not possibly make ourselves understood to them... We could not find our feet with them.

I really want to say that scruples in thinking begin with (have their roots in) instinct. Or again: a language-game does not have its origin in consideration. Consideration is part of a language-game. (Wittgenstein, 1967, §§383–391)

We need to consider how radical a revision of our understanding of human beings, of ourselves, this scenario sketched by Wittgenstein would be. But the same point applies to our understanding of other animals. So, we further need to consider in a similar way how absent those shared natural responses we have to other animals, and to an extent absent their responses to us, our understanding of our morally inflected fellowship with them would be radically altered.

Thinking of our relations with other animals, Raimond Gaita has suggested ‘there is every reason to believe that [Wittgenstein’s point about the responses of human beings to each other] applies to the responses of human beings to animals and (to a

limited degree) to their responses to us.’ (Gaita, 2002, p. 60). This is perhaps most obvious in our relations with those animals that we have, as one might say, developed together with, dogs, cats, and various farm and working animals, as I have already noted, such as horses. While these animals are not wholly part of the life we share with other human beings, it seems fair all the same to say that we share a life with them. As Gaita notes, ‘dogs respond to our moods’ and, as he continues, it is natural for us to see intentions in other animals such as, for example, when ‘a dog chases a cat’ (*Ibid*). To this, I would add that certain animals, certainly dogs, can respond to our *suffering* in ways that indicate their concern for us just as we are moved on occasion to sympathy or pity by the suffering of animals. It is in virtue of such shared responsiveness that it makes sense to say they are indeed moral relations, in the sense of mutual recognition, between human beings and animals. So, as I noted earlier, I think Williams is mistaken to think that the only question for us here is how we should treat them, for it can certainly matter a great deal how some other animals (our pets, animals we work with) treat *us*. Note here that the mutual recognition between such animals and us humans, which is at least part of our shared life, and that sense of fellowship that there is between us, can break down; either of us can fail to live up to the demands of this fellowship. Of course, the pet dog will not ask: ought I to have acted in this way to my owner? Nevertheless, in our relations with pets and working animals, in the many immediate, unreflective, again as I say primitive, ways in which we respond to each other, there are nevertheless on both sides expressions of, for example, anger, hurt and contrition, expressions that give sustenance to what I would suggest is a morally inflected conception of such relations. None of this is to deny that there are radical differences between our fellowship with human beings and our relationship with other animals. But these differences have nothing to do with differences in morally relevant properties possessed by them and us. Consider what Gaita says about his dog Gypsy:

Sometimes when I see her on the bedroom or kitchen rug or note the ease with which she wanders through the house, I experience the kind of perceptual flux that occurs when I see now one side and then the other of an ambiguous drawing. In all sorts of ways she is part of the family, participating intelligently and with complex feeling in our lives. But then she does something – chase a cat, for example, her killer instinct aroused – whose nature is so deeply instinctual that she appears wholly animal in a way that invites a capital ‘A’. (*Ibid*, p. 63)

As Gaita goes on to concede human beings are killers too, nevertheless, there is ‘an apparent absence of psychological dimension in Gypsy’s drive to kill that is so disturbing and makes her seem so *other* to us, so much a different kind of being’ (*Ibid*, pp. 63–4). The difference that Gaita is registering here though is not the absence of some morally relevant property in Gypsy. Rather, at the kind of moment Gaita relates, Gypsy and her kind of being appears totally alien from our human way of being, alien in much the same kind of way in which the way of being of Wittgenstein’s tribe in *Zettel* appears totally alien to us. What I want to suggest is that defenders of what I have called the property view misunderstand both what grounds our relations with other animals and, given the nature of those grounds, the limits of those relations. But at the same time, when the property view is coupled with a

certain utilitarian way of thinking, this seems to imply, ironically enough, that there *is* after all a fundamental moral distinction to be made concerning the moral significance of at least ordinary human beings as opposed to other animals. This I will now explain.

Let us return to the chapter by Williams considered earlier. As Williams says, for thinkers such as Singer, the idea behind the human prejudice, which they condemn, is that while we have the sentiment of ‘compassion or sympathy or the belief that suffering is a bad thing, ... we express these sentiments in irrationally restricted ways’ (Williams, 2006, p 145). If suffering is a bad thing, the thought goes, it is a bad thing wherever it occurs. But then, as Williams goes on to say, the ‘question arises, whether we should not be in the business of reducing the harm that other animals cause one another, and generally the suffering that goes on in nature’ (*Ibid*, p.146). For a utilitarian like Singer, that has got to be *prima facie* a reasonable question to ask, but it is hard to think of a question that could establish a more complete divide between the moral status of human life and that of other animal life. The moral status we would assign to ourselves in virtue of such a thought really places us in an important sense outside of the natural world altogether. We would become not mere fellow creatures with the rest of sentient animal life but the guardians and judges of sentient life itself. So, if we *could* bring it about, for example, that the lion should lie down with the lamb, or remove Gypsy’s killer instincts, it would seem we have *prima facie* a moral obligation to do so. That there are all sorts of practical reasons not to try and do any of these is beside the point. The point is that the question I have indicated makes sense on the target view and that in itself indicates a certain attitude towards the natural world.

The attitude towards the natural world that is here being expressed, I suggest, is one of a desire or claim to mastery over it. As I have noted, for someone like McMahan, reason requires that we suspended and submit to critical reflection what I have, following Wittgenstein, called our primitive reactions—our expressions of feeling and our response to the expression of others—in order to see whether they are in fact justified by the facts. But this very act itself indicates a certain attitude towards the natural world. Like the kind of attitudes given in what I have noted are our primitive reactions to human beings and animals, this attitude indicates a certain conception of ourselves and of the natural world. But further, it is an attitude that if comprehensively embraced leads to a radically different understanding of the value of the natural world than has been traditionally understood. According to such an understanding of ourselves, including our relation to the natural world that this understanding suggests, certain values, indeed a whole conception of value, become invisible to us. What is lost to us here is illustrated in the following example from Yasha Kemal’s novella *The Birds Have Also Gone* (Kemal, 1987).

The story revolves around three homeless young boys, Semih, Hayri and Süleyman, living on the outskirts of Istanbul, who try to revive the ancient tradition (*azat buzat*), dating back to Byzantium, in which small birds are captured, specifically so, for a small sum, a person might release them uttering the words ‘Fly little bird, free as the air, and meet me at the gates of Paradise...’ (*Ibid*, p. 55). An old man, Mahmut, who helps the boys in their project reminisces on the tradition from his childhood:

Ever since ancient Byzantium, and even further back ... The little autumn birds would come not like this, not like now, but in hordes, clouding the sky, like swarms of butterflies... If you happened to be sitting by one of the thistle shrubs and you rose suddenly, you would find yourself engulfed by hundreds of those tiny birds, their wings brushing your face and hands. There was a blue bird then, it doesn't come anymore, the species must have died out. So tiny it was... this bird was a rich blue, with large black eyes and a lovely graceful bill, that flooded a man's face, his very soul, in a torrent of light. The whole world was drowned in this rich blueness. Why, those birds even made the night blue, and the moonlight too... They would perch on your shoulders, your head, your arms, so many of them you looked like you had turned into a blue statue. 'In all the years of my life, I've never come across a bird so close to people, so warm, so trusting, more human than a human being.' (Kemal, pp. 53-4)

In modern Istanbul, however, their project is an almost total failure. In the first neighbourhood they visit, this is their reception:

'You mean I'm to give you two and a half liras for a bird that I'll throw away at once, is that it?' a long-faced woman... inquired.

'Well yes,' Süleyman said.

'And why should I do that, I'd like to know?'

'Why? For a good deed! To do a good deed so that...'

'That's a good one!' a short yellow haired youth chimed in. 'So you go catching birds and, doing so, you commit a sin, and we save them and do a good deed, eh?' (*Ibid*, p. 95)

The two paragraphs I have quoted above illustrate very different conceptions of value. To consider the second quotation, the modern inhabitants of Istanbul can only see the tradition as a financial transaction, and a perverse one at that. The birds were free and now they are free again; all that has happened is that a small amount of money has been exchanged. But consider Mahmut's words. What this purely transactional account of the tradition misses is *the relationship internal to it between human beings and the birds*. Mahmut speaks in tones of wonder at these tiny creatures in their millions pausing in their migration and of the connection, as he sees it, between human beings and these birds; 'more human than a human being' as Mahmut says. Think also of the prayer recited on release of the birds, that the birds are to meet *us* at the gates of Paradise. What the modern inhabitants of Istanbul are unable to see is the sense of ourselves as *part* of nature that is expressed in this tradition. Further, the value that is expressed in this tradition can really only be understood as part of a wider world view in which it was embedded, a world view in which the life of Istanbul and its citizens is interwoven with the natural world and in particular with the life of birds. According to the kind of conception of value that moral individualism suggests, we can see that the birds have moral value as sentient beings, but that is to say merely that their value or moral significance is one among many other such items of value in the world that we need to consider in how we act. The only question is how we should treat them. According to such a conception, we should just leave the birds alone.

What Mahmut's words suggests, however, is a conception of value that can only be understood through the kind of shared creaturely fellowship with birds that Mahmut expresses. Thinking of my earlier discussion of Wittgenstein, the moral significance of such fellowship is given in our natural, primitive, responsiveness to the world. Such responses involve, as Mahmut's words suggest, wonder at life and our participation in and celebration of life. The value that is at stake here derives its meaning in part from the kind of ancient tradition that Kemal describes, one in which people, in honour of the natural world and our place in it, in a small act of charity, pay for a tiny, captured bird to fly free. One might say that this tradition enacts the values involved here. The important point I want to stress then is that the attitude that is given such a conception of ourselves and our connection to the natural world rather than being one of mastery over the natural world is one of humility and awe in the face of it. Kemal's novel is a kind of lament for the passing of a way, this way, of thinking about and being in the natural world. The traditional relationship with the natural world—of which people's relationship with birds was so much a part—and with it the worldview of Mahmut and the many generations that preceded him is rapidly disappearing. At one point, the narrator, really Kemal, asks Mahmut, "So charity is dead is it?" "Dead?" Mahmut said. "No, not dead but in trouble, stranded somewhere or other." But as Mahmut goes on, "The birds too have gone away," ... We fell silent. The birds are gone now. And with the birds... It's no use... Even the birds are gone.' (*Ibid*, 56–7). The birds are gone because the plains on which they paused in their migration to feed are being covered up with new housing estates. As Kemal says:

With the passing of years, the thistle fields diminished gradually. New settlements sprang up and expanded... Ugly concrete apartment blocks began to crowd the lovely dale of Florya... And now only this small tract of land between Menekşe and Basinköy, between sea and wood is left for the birds to return every year... But last year, the owner of the land parcelled it out and sold the plots to new-rich buyers... And next year, in place of this copper hued thistle field there will be a mass of concrete villas...

And maybe the birds, impelled by some ancient, deep-rooted instinct, will come again to the sky over where the lofty plain tree is now... They will pause for a moment, searching for something, vaguely remembering. They will flutter in little groups over the concrete agglomeration of houses, and finding nowhere to alight will take themselves off like some remote sorrow. (*Ibid*, pp. 83-5)

If one thinks that our principal failing with respect to the rest of sentient nature is speciesism, it is hard to see how one can make sense of the kind of loss of value that Kemal here laments.

The birds are gone. So, what of it? Are we supposed to weigh the interests of the birds against those of the residents of the new concrete villas? That of course fails to capture what has been lost. For the recognition of the value at stake depends on the kind of fellowship with other creatures that is given in the natural responses to them Kemal describes in the case of Mahmut. What Mahmut and Kemal mourn is not merely that the birds have gone but that the concepts through which one can recognise the kind of value at stake in our life with them, concepts that are dependent

on a way of being in and responding to the natural world, are, if not gone, at least as Mahmut puts it, ‘in trouble’. Finally, the attitude to the natural world that is replacing that of people like Mahmut, what I have called the attitude of mastery, certainly suggests one idea of human distinctiveness. But one from which we may recoil.

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Declarations

Conflict of Interest The author has no competing interests.

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