

The political turn of the animal ethical discourse.

Highlighting the virtue ethical approach

Emnée van den Brandeler

Student number 5626110

Supervisor: dr. Sven Nyholm

Second reader: dr. Naomi Kloosterboer

Utrecht University, Faculty of Humanities

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Abstract

A growing body of work within the animal ethical discourse has been identified as taking a ‘Political Turn’. This turn is primarily characterised by efforts to propose pragmatic approaches to normative reflections about our human-nonhuman-animal-relationships in society, as well as by arguments to the effect that the correct treatment of nonhuman animals within society is a matter of justice. However, these efforts—that predominantly focus on moral rights—have yet to assert legal animal rights that protect against institutionalised animal oppression and effectuate the radical change at the political level they propose. In this thesis, I examine the potential of a virtue ethical approach. In particular, I investigate whether a virtue ethical approach could help the cause within the political turn. I discuss various virtue ethicists’ works and consider how their proposed moral virtues can indeed offer practical guidance in complex situations, do not succumb to anthropocentrism while doing so when focusing on other-regarding virtues, and support the need for both individual and institutional change by appealing to collective virtues. Moreover, I propose that we ought to recognise animal advocacy as a fully-fledged social justice movement, before the political turn can be taken successfully. I argue that virtue ethics is able to support this endeavour by emphasising the intersectionality between animal advocacy and other social movements. By its emphasis on the combined moral agents’ sustained commitment to act in accordance with moral virtue, and the cultivation of said virtues through habituation, it will help the agent to achieve their state of flourishing. I conclude, that including the virtue ethical approach within the political turn seems promising for supporting its success, not in spite of lacking a ‘language of rights’, but precisely because of its rich and diverse ‘language of virtues’. Accordingly, this perspective should therefore be explored further.

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Introduction

Debates within the field of animal ethics that used to be dominated by philosophical theorists, have increasingly included views from political theorists. This ‘Political Turn’ within animal ethics, facilitates a shift in focus from purely theoretical considerations of nonhuman animals’ moral considerability, to more practical considerations that are rooted in political theory. As such, the political turn of animal ethics concerns itself with questions of how our responsibilities towards nonhuman animals should be implemented at the political level. And consequently whether and how these moral considerations should be legally enforced. Even though this political turn at the core remains a theoretical endeavour, it is characterised by its pragmatic approach to changing the human-nonhuman-animal relationship in society.¹ Because of this desire for creating an animal critical theory which has practical significance at a political level, philosophers have mostly focused on animal rights. Seeing as a ‘right’ is a clearly understood and defined concept within political philosophy, an animal right is thought to create the most promising opportunity for including the interests of animals at the political level. The vast majority of theories within this political turn thus try to argue that certain *legal rights* for animals should be enforced by the state, through arguing that animals have certain *moral rights*.²

Over the years, animal ethical debates have reached the attention of the wider public. The importance of a good human-nonhuman-animal-relationship—in contexts ranging from wildlife conservation, keeping pets, animal testing, and animal agriculture, to zoo animals—has gained more and more attention at the societal and political level. That said, the theoretical efforts thus far have been unable to solidify our moral responsibilities towards animals at the political state level. Radical change in the human-nonhuman-animal-relationship has not yet been enforced legally, in a way that animal ethicists have tried to argue for.³ I argue this shows the need for the consideration of a different theoretical normative approach to effectuate a successful political turn of the animal ethical discourse. Put differently; there is a need for a

¹ Milligan, “The political turn in animal rights,” 6-15.

² Cochrane, *Animal Rights Without Liberation: Applied Ethics and Human Obligations*; Donaldson and Kymlicka, *Zoopolis: A Political Theory of Animal Rights*; Garner, *A Theory of Justice: Animal Rights in a Nonideal World*; Rowlands, “Making Light of the Ethical? The Ethics and Politics of Animal Rights,” 22.

³ The critical reader might counter by mentioning certain specific legal rights that have been granted to certain animals, in very particular situations. The animal rights I mean to discuss in this thesis however, are those that aim to fight the institutionalised oppression of all animals in our modern societies. Thus, this argument reaches beyond singular examples wherein legal animal rights have been enforced.

strong theoretical underpinning of the political turn which is not based on moral rights per se, while at the same time not undermining this approach.

In this thesis, I will therefore examine whether a virtue ethical approach may offer a promising alternative theoretical basis for the political turn within animal ethics, which would benefit the overall animal advocacy movement.⁴ Arguably current political systems are human-centred. With that in mind, I aim to examine the potential of what I will call a '*Virtuous Political Turn*', because of its comparable human-centred starting point for moral reflection on the interspecies, human-nonhuman-animal relationship. It focuses on what is morally required (at a political level) from humans, instead of focusing on specific properties of nonhuman animals that put certain claims on humans. I argue that a focus on virtue ethics in the political turn deserves more consideration as it offers a promising theoretical basis that will aid its success. Such an approach focuses on what virtuous agents ought to be and do, and what virtuous actions in regard to the treatment of different animals in society are required from humans. While doing so it does not depend on particular properties of animals such as sentience, or consciousness, and their corresponding moral status views that are often disputed. I will argue for this position in the following manner.

In chapter one, I will explain what exactly is understood by the 'Political Turn' and what criteria are argued to be necessary to this turn.⁵ I will briefly mention which animal philosophers have dominated the field thus far, and how these differing views attempt to influence our current human-nonhuman-animal-relationship at the political level. Among others, I will mention the work of Eva Meijer,⁶ Sue Donaldson and Will Kymlicka,⁷ Robert Garner,⁸ and Alasdair Cochrane.⁹ Moreover, I will discuss the difference between moral and legal (animal) rights.¹⁰ Theorists who have added to the political turn debate, assume that moral rights offer the best opportunity for eventually asserting legal rights for animals, either implicitly or explicitly. This begs the question whether it is rightfully assumed that legal rights are most likely to be asserted

⁴ Here I mean the nonhuman animal movement in the broadest sense that includes different animal advocacy movements with varying goals and strategies, that are simultaneously all connected by a shared aim of considering nonhuman animals in order to aid them. Other times I will refer to the animal rights movement specifically, which is part of this broader nonhuman animal movement.

⁵ Milligan, "The political turn in animal rights," 6-15.

⁶ "Interspecies Democracies"; "Interspecies Encounters and the Political Turn: From Dialogues to Deliberation."

⁷ "Animals in Political Theory"; "Animal Rights, Multiculturalism, and the Left"; "Locating Animals in Political Philosophy"; *Zoopolis: A Political Theory of Animal Rights*.

⁸ *A Theory of Justice for Animals: Animal Rights in a Nonideal World*.

⁹ *Animal Rights Without Liberation: Applied Ethics and Human Obligations*.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 13-15.

from a normative approach that focuses on moral rights. In this thesis, I aim to question the assumption that it is.

In chapter two, I will therefore consider and examine the applicability of a virtue ethic for the political turn of the animal ethical discourse. In order to do so I will focus on the implications of a virtue ethical approach for our treatment towards animals generally speaking, by discussing Aristotle's *The Nicomachean Ethics*, and by calling upon the works of the following environmental virtue ethicists: David Clowney,¹¹ Rosalind Hursthouse,¹² Dale Jamieson,¹³ Ronald Sandler,¹⁴ and Louke van Wensveen.¹⁵ In doing so, I will highlight a few more particular virtues (and vices) that have been approached by virtue ethicists for examining our position in regard to nonhuman animals thus far, like respect for nature, the emotion of wonder,¹⁶ ecological responsibility,¹⁷ empathy,¹⁸ and compassion,¹⁹ among others. Thus the first part of this chapter examines what a virtue ethic would imply for the human-nonhuman-animal-relationship, and what I find so promising about this specific approach.

In the second part of this chapter I discuss several objections that call into question the legitimacy of the virtue ethical approach for the political turn. Firstly I discuss the concern of its practical strength. I rebut the objection that a 'language of virtues' is not able to provide action guidance, and that a focus on virtues is insufficient for discussing justice issues. I do so by showing that consequentialist and deontological accounts establish that such actions are wrong, but that they consequently offer no practical guidance to the moral agent, unlike virtue ethics which does. Moreover, I call upon Aristotle's virtue of justice and Curzer's defence of this virtue which is often said to be underdeveloped.²⁰ In addition, I agree with Nussbaum's position that 'virtue ethics' as a general term is confused, because virtuous language is apparent in any influential normative theory.²¹ I argue that instead of undermining a virtue ethical approach within the political turn, it does the opposite. Namely, because of the fact that some

¹¹ "Collective Environmental Virtue."

¹² "Applying Virtue Ethics to Our Treatment of the Other Animals"; "Environmental Virtue Ethics."

¹³ "When Utilitarians Should Be Virtue Theorists"; Frolov, "What is a Green Virtue? Is This a Satisfying or Unsatisfying Response To Climate Change?"

¹⁴ "Environmental Virtue Ethics."

¹⁵ "The Emergence of Ecological Virtue Language".

¹⁶ Hursthouse, "Applying Virtue Ethics to Our Treatment of the Other Animals."

¹⁷ Scott, "Ecological Responsibility as an Imperative and a Virtue."

¹⁸ Gruen, *Entangled Empathy: An Alternative Ethic for Our Relationships with Animals*.

¹⁹ Ramp and Bekoff, "Compassion as a Practical and Evolved Ethic for Conservation."

²⁰ Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, bk. V; Curzer, "Aristotle's Account of The Virtue of Justice."

²¹ "Virtue Ethics: A Misleading Category?"

understanding of virtues is apparent in most normative theories, this underpins the importance of focusing on the legitimacy and usefulness of virtues at a political level.

Second, I discuss the concern that a virtue ethic is too human-centred and anthropocentric to sufficiently take the interests of nonhuman animals into account. I refute that a human-centric approach is inherently egoistic and therefore anthropocentric by mentioning various virtues that emphasise the importance of others' interests. Third, I discuss the concern that individual character traits cannot support the need for institutional change—which is characteristic to the political turn—because of its focus on individual moral agents. I rebut this by drawing upon Clowney's 'collective environmental virtues'.²²

In chapter three, I will strengthen my argument that virtue ethics will support the political turn even further. Namely by discussing that through considering the virtue ethical approach, we may increase the likelihood that the animal rights movement will be embraced as a social justice movement. This recognition for animal advocacy as having the standing of a proper social movement, and thus, recognition of the magnitude of animal oppression is needed before the political turn can be taken successfully.²³ I will discuss the intersectionality of social movements by considering how various social justice issues are interlinked through systems of domination.²⁴ Specifically by considering elements of sexism and racism and the way they intersect with animal oppression. Thereafter, I will mention four concerns that explain why the Left has yet to fully embrace the animal rights movement as a social justice movement, even in light of these intersectional elements with other social justice movements.

First, I discuss a concern about the different nature of protagonists and beneficiaries in the animal rights movement as opposed to other social movements.²⁵ I show that a focus on virtue ethics specifically will make the lifestyle changes that are required from humans easier, as the virtuous person relinquishes the benefits from animal oppression more easily. Moreover, I argue that living in accordance with moral virtue is conducive with one's own flourishing, making the strict distinction between protagonists and beneficiaries exaggerated.

²² "Collective Environmental Virtue."

²³ Stallwood, "Are We Smart Enough to Know When to Take the Political Turn for Animals?," p. 280.

²⁴ Cudworth, "Intersectionality, Species and Social Domination," 93; Gigliotti, "The Struggle for Compassion and Justice through Critical Animal Studies," 196; Kemmerer, "Introduction" in *Sister Species: Women, Animals and Social Justice*, 25.

²⁵ Stallwood, "Are We Smart Enough to Know When to Take the Political Turn for Animals?," 287.

Second, I argue that the ‘displacement’ concern that commitment to animal rights will go at the expense of other movements is unfounded.²⁶ Precisely, the unveiling of the intersectionality between social movements through a virtue ethical approach, will aid the effectiveness of other social movements. Once moral virtues are incorporated into one’s character through habituation, these inclinations to act in the right way—especially in the case of another social justice movement, albeit another one—will result in right actions. In this case: in moral agents supporting other social justice movements as well.

Third, the ‘trivialisation’ concern that embracing animal rights as a social justice issue will weaken the moral significance of human injustices,²⁷ I argue can only be rooted in a philosophical commitment to human-superiority, or in an empirical prediction that is clearly false. In addition, I discuss the other-regarding virtues of compassion and empathy that incline the moral agent to care for others.²⁸ As this other-regarding element is made part of one’s moral character, it not only extends to humans but to all living beings. And similarly by acting empathetically or compassionately towards non-human animals, the moral agent asserts the moral virtue of empathy and compassion in their character. If anything, the virtue ethical approach to social justice movements and their intersections only improves the understanding of their combined and individual importance for justice.

Fourth, I agree that the concern that animal advocacy could perpetuate racial hierarchies and biases should be taken seriously.²⁹ However, I show that virtue ethical approaches support that animal exploitation should tackle the greater institutions that exploit nonhuman animals and uphold their institutionalised oppression, instead of focusing on minorities’ mistreatment of animals to disregard our “Western” mistreatment of animals.³⁰ Virtue ethics is able to respect that not everyone in society has similar opportunity to commit to animal advocacy, due to their personal circumstances and perhaps their own experiences of oppression.³¹ The virtue ethical approach is not a one size fits all approach, but precisely takes the particular circumstances of the agent’s life into account. Of course the animal rights discourse should be aware of the risk

²⁶ Donaldson and Kymlicka, “Animal Rights, Multiculturalism, and the Left,” 118.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 119.

²⁸ Betzler, “The Relational Value of Empathy”; Gruen, *Entangled Empathy: An Alternative Ethic for Our Relationships with Animals*; Jenni, “Review of ‘Entangled Empathy: An Alternative Ethic for Our Relationships with Animals’ ”; Ramp and Bekoff, “Compassion as a Practical and Evolved Ethic for Conservation.”

²⁹ Donaldson and Kymlicka, “Animal Rights, Multiculturalism, and the Left,” 121.; Harper, “Connections: Speciesism, racism, and whiteness as the norm,” 75.

³⁰ I acknowledge that even the use of the word “Western” is argued to be problematic, as it implies that “Non-Western” is in any sense less-than. For the development of my argument however, I do not think it necessary to discuss this notion further.

³¹ Hursthouse, “Applying Virtue Ethics to Our Treatment of the Other Animals,” 149.

to perpetuate racial hierarchies and act on racial biases. Contemplation by the moral agent, however, is a promising way of dealing with this risk.

Lastly, I will offer some practical insights into how virtuous agents could be inclined to enable practical change at the political level,³² precisely through recognising the animal rights movement as a social justice movement. Furthermore, seeing as public opinion creates the possibility for public policy reform and laws,³³ individuals' attitudes and feelings towards societal injustices are crucial to consider.

In this thesis, I therefore conclude, that the political turn in its current state cannot yet assert animal rights. Seeing as a virtue ethical approach will aid this endeavour it should be considered further for the political turn of the animal ethical discourse to be successful. Even though arguing for animal moral rights is ultimately an incredibly relevant aspect of the turn, a virtue ethical perspective is crucial to the turn's overall success, and one might dare say the success of the political turn is impeded without it. A Virtuous Political Turn deserves more attention from animal philosophers and political philosophers as it poses a promising way of taking animals' interests seriously on the political state level.

³² Nocella, White, and Cudworth, "Introduction: The Intersections of Critical Animal Studies and Anarchist Studies for Total Liberation"; Stallwood, "Are We Smart Enough to Know When to Take the Political Turn for Animals?," 299.

³³ Stallwood, "Are We Smart Enough to Know When to Take the Political Turn for Animals?," 289.

Chapter 1. The political turn of animal ethics

From moral philosophy to political philosophy

The animal ethical discourse has long tried to argue for including the interest of animals into our moral considerations. Moral philosophers attempt to argue in different ways, how humans ought to act in regard to the human-animal-relationships we enter into. Perhaps two of the most well-known works in traditional animal ethics so far are Singer's *'Animal Liberation'* and Regan's *'The Case for Animal Rights'*.³⁴ With different theoretical approaches, they both aim to assert that nonhuman animals hold claim to a certain treatment from humans, because of the type of beings they are. For Singer, this is because animals are sentient beings and therefore their interests deserve equal consideration.³⁵ For Regan, animals are subjects-of-a-life, who have individual lives and desires and are not our property to use and exploit, just as no human is.³⁶ Although their theories differ, they both attempt to secure rights for animals through logic and reason.³⁷

Not only the methods but also the end goal of various animal theorists within the nonhuman animal movement differs; ranging from improving animals' lives, to their total liberation. Even within the animal rights movement more specifically there are different goals kept in mind. Regan, for example, is committed to the total abolition of animal use in science, commercial animal agriculture and commercial and sport hunting and trapping.³⁸ Whereas, there are also animal rights theories, who do not call for total animal liberation. Cochrane's interest based rights framework for example, asserts the right for animals not to be killed and not to suffer. Consequently, he argues that practices such as animal experimentation, genetic engineering or keeping animals for entertainment are not automatically morally impermissible if these practices do not cause animals to suffer, all else being equal.³⁹ In short, there are many different approaches to this movement which have been put forth over the years. The success of the nonhuman animal movement as a whole however has been anything but successful as more nonhuman animals suffer and are exploited than ever before.⁴⁰

³⁴ Singer, *Animal Liberation: The Definitive Classic of the Animal Movement.*; Regan, *The Case for Animal Rights.*

³⁵ "A Utilitarian Defense of Animal Liberation."

³⁶ Milligan, "The Political Turn in Animal Rights."

³⁷ Although Singer does not use 'rights' explicitly in his utilitarian work *'Animal Liberation'*, he "describes rights as a, 'convenient political shorthand". See Cochrane, Garner, and O'Sullivan, "Animal Ethics and the Political," 263.

³⁸ "The Radical Egalitarian Case for Animal Rights," 106.

³⁹ Cochrane, *Animal Rights Without Liberation: Applied Ethics and Human Obligations.*

⁴⁰ Woodhall and Garmendia da Trindade, "Introduction" in *Ethical and Political Approaches to Nonhuman Animal Issues*, 2.

Moreover animal rights theories have not gone into detail about the political institutionalisation of their theories. In fact there seems to be a gap between animal ethical theory on the one hand, and political theory on the other. There has however been an increase in political interest in the animal ethical field as a consequence of this dissatisfaction with traditional approaches.⁴¹ The common denominator of politically-focused accounts can be identified in works put forward by theorists such as Garner,⁴² Cochrane,⁴³ Donaldson & Kymlicka,⁴⁴ and Nussbaum.⁴⁵ Milligan identifies a ‘political turn’ in the theoretical side of the nonhuman animal movement.⁴⁶ The political turn he states, is characterised by a few criteria that make this contemporary animal ethical work politically distinct;

- i. A broadening of the appeal to liberal values,
- ii. A strong emphasis on a rights theory,
- iii. An emphasis on positive rights,
- iv. A downgrading from marginal cases, and
- v. A broadly pragmatic attitude towards political engagement and compromise.⁴⁷

In response to this, Cochrane, Garner and O’Sullivan have argued that although all of these aspects indeed are apparent in most of the contemporary works, they are not shared in all work that is regarded as part of the political turn, and they are not distinct enough to be an essential feature of what a political turn might be. They conclude the following⁴⁸: First, the mere use of political language and concepts is insufficient to provide a basis for this turn. This general political engagement has been apparent in the earliest work within traditional animal ethics, and can be found in works from Regan and Singer for example, who are not regarded as part of this ‘political turn’. Of course the very notion of animal rights is political.⁴⁹ Second, other possible characteristics such as a relational position and a focus on positive duties, feasible and pragmatic prescriptions and the avoidance of first principles are insufficiently shared among these newest works, to constitute a new political turn. Instead, they argue that the political turn

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² *A Theory of Justice for Animals: Animal Rights in a Nonideal World.*

⁴³ *Animal Rights Without Liberation: Applied Ethics and Human Obligations.*

⁴⁴ *Zoopolis: A Political Theory of Animal Rights.*

⁴⁵ *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership.*

⁴⁶ Woodhall and Garmendia da Trindade, “Introduction,” 2.

⁴⁷ Milligan, “The Political Turn in Animal Rights,” 7.

⁴⁸ I will not discuss their line of argument in detail, but only briefly discuss their conclusions to build from. I believe this to be most relevant and interesting to the further development of my thesis. In the conclusion, I admit that this is one of the limitations of my current thesis.

⁴⁹ Here, I mean the loose claim that rights generally speaking are associated with political ideas and political philosophizing.

is made distinct because of its focus on *justice*, and “more specifically on how our political institutions, structures and process might be transformed so as to secure just human-animal relations.”⁵⁰

I will build my thesis on the conviction that indeed these two aspects are crucial to the political turn; i.e. its *pragmatic* approach to achieving *justice* for animals.⁵¹ It is however debatable whether the rights movement at its current stage will be able to accomplish such transformation of institutions and structures.⁵² In this thesis, I share this doubt and argue that first a virtue ethical perspective should be considered as it proposes a promising way to aid this aim of the political turn; i.e. to provide a successful pragmatic animal rights theory that achieves justice for animals and that can be institutionalised at a political level.

Thus a shift in the animal ethical field towards more political engagement is afoot.⁵³ Not only our moral responsibilities of individual moral agents towards animals, but also the moral responsibilities that institutions such as governments have towards animals are increasingly being considered. A political framework that includes the interests of animals has not however gotten the attention within the field of political philosophy, and has yet to become part of the ‘popular imagination’.⁵⁴ Political philosophy concerns itself with determining when power is exercised in a legitimate way, and how these power relations can be held accountable to norms of justice. Thus, “a legitimate state is that it aspires to justice and governs in the interests of the governed”.⁵⁵ It is often believed and argued by animal ethicists that “rights are the best tools to come to justice because they are designed to protect the inviolable interests of individuals, and as such they are particularly important for those who cannot stand up for themselves within current formations of power”.⁵⁶ Given the set-up of our political systems I am inclined to agree this much is true. However it begs the question whether solely focusing on *moral* animal rights directly, is the most fruitful approach to reach the goal of actually instating *legal* animal rights,

⁵⁰ Cochrane, Garner, and O’Sullivan, “Animal Ethics and the Political,” 274.

⁵¹ Thus seemingly contradictory—in contrast to Cochrane, Garner and O’Sullivan—I do include a ‘pragmatic’ requirement to be crucial for the political turn. However, I extend their understanding of ‘pragmatic prescriptions’, and rather, take Milligan’s understanding as a broadly pragmatic attitude towards political engagement and compromise. As such, I acknowledge their view that pragmatic prescriptions *in isolation* are not enough to make the identified body of work distinct for the political turn. Instead, I understand this requirement for pragmatic approaches to be directly linked to the justice requirement. That these elements are *combined* in a sense. Therefore I consider to what extent the virtue ethical approach can underpin these combined elements, not in isolation from each other.

⁵² Stallwood, “Are We Smart Enough to Know When to Take the Political Turn for Animals?,” 277.

⁵³ Abbey, “Sue Donaldson and Will Kymlicka, *Zoopolis: A Political Theory of Animal Rights*, Reviewed By,” 446.

⁵⁴ Kymlicka and Donaldson, “Locating Animals in Political Philosophy,” 693.

⁵⁵ Kymlicka and Donaldson, “Animals in Political Theory,” 43.

⁵⁶ Meijer, “Interspecies Democracies,” 61.

or instating laws that support animal advocacy. Like others before me,⁵⁷ I argue this is beyond the reach of the current animal rights debate.

Moral and legal rights

As identified by Milligan, the political turn mainly emphasises rights approaches within animal ethics.⁵⁸ It wishes to see legal animal rights institutionalised to ensure protection of animals' lives at a political level. The language of rights—either moral or legal—has an intrinsic relationship to law and politics, and moreover immediately implies that the treatment of animals is a matter of *justice*.⁵⁹ Animal rights theories account for the moral rights of animals that are derived from moral reasoning and principles, as a way to propose what legal rights of animals should be. However, “It is one thing to claim *moral rights* for animals; it is something else to successfully organise and persuade society (and its representational governments) to recognise and defend *legal rights* for animals”.⁶⁰ Moreover, the latter is not just a job for philosophers and ethicists alone, but requires the expertise of social scientists, lawyers, historians, social movement theorists, activists and others to develop new public policy.⁶¹ Furthermore, it is not automatically a given that moral rights for animals would result in similar legal rights in every political state around the world. Given the vast differences in society's cultures, political systems and human-animal-relationships it would be rash to assume moral rights will—or even should—result in the same legal rights. This seems to have worrying implications for democratic procedures. A moral right does not claim it should be implemented at any cost.⁶²

Animal ethics vs interspecies ethics

Shortly, I want to discuss the implications of using ‘animal ethics’ as an umbrella term to discuss the morality of human-nonhuman-animal-relationships. Some philosophers namely argue that ‘interspecies ethics’ is a preferable term as it steers away from an ethic that is too human-centred. Might we not have to consider that not only an animal turn, but an *interspecies* political turn is required if we truly wish to create legitimate power-structures, and a political system that respects and protects the interests of all its citizens? An interspecies political turn implies that political communities should be set-up differently so as to incorporate *all* animals' interests in democratic decision making. Donaldson and Kymlicka for example, do not merely

⁵⁷ Stallwood, “Are We Smart Enough to Know When to Take the Political Turn for Animals?”

⁵⁸ “The Political Turn in Animal Rights,” 7.

⁵⁹ Cochrane, *Animal Rights Without Liberation: Applied Ethics and Human Obligations*, 13.

⁶⁰ Stallwood, “Are We Smart Enough to Know When to Take the Political Turn for Animals?,” 292.

⁶¹ Cochrane, *Animal Rights Without Liberation: Applied Ethics and Human Obligations*, 15.

⁶² *Ibid.*

argue for asserting animal rights, but also that only a political interspecies democracy would avoid tyrannical institutions and be just.⁶³ Meijer similarly argues, that animals have agency over their actions and decisions,⁶⁴ and even proposes we should recognise *political agency* of nonhuman animals.⁶⁵

This of course would have vast consequences for current political systems.⁶⁶ This requires extensive research into the decision making capacities of different nonhuman animal species, and consequently how these could be incorporated into one democratic system alongside humans. Perhaps, such an approach—and even different concepts altogether that are less human centred—indeed is needed for a true just society. However, seeing as it is my position that asserting legal animal rights is already beyond the reach of the current animal rights movement, realising interspecies democratic political communities—although inspiring—seems unrealistic. Now this is not to say that such endeavours should stop and are not ultimately needed in the political turn. Indeed, they might be the very end goal we should be striving for. Here, however I aim to discuss that we ought to take a step back and make progress through considering what virtuous behaviour asks moral agents to do, and how such insights in the end will aid the animal rights movement's and the broader nonhuman animal movement's success.

Although I will not discuss such interspecies ethical debates, it is likely that this same virtue ethical perspective will aid the realisation of interspecies democratic political communities as well. Having said that, I emphasise again that a pragmatic approach is central to the political turn.⁶⁷ I therefore stage my discussion in the 'animal ethical' rather than the 'interspecies ethics' debate that takes only humans as moral agents. For now, I will not go further into the question whether nonhuman animals could potentially also be classified as moral agents—as an

⁶³ Donaldson and Kymlicka, *Zoopolis: A Political Theory of Animal Rights*.

⁶⁴ A related debate to be considered here is whether Artificial Intelligence (AI) or robots have agency. Interestingly, through robot-animal analogy, these debates both focus on aspects of consciousness, indications of consciousness in the non-human, make use of mirror-tests, and of course both question whether they should have rights. Having said that, the question of whether robots and AI should be endowed with rights is disanalogous in the sense that robots are not sentient, i.e. they do not experience pain and suffer similar to animals. Regardless of a shared sense of consciousness in regard to animals and robots, they will not completely be based on the same philosophical arguments. For such robot-animal analogies and disanalogies, consult Levy, "The Ethical Treatment of Artificially Conscious Robots," 214.

⁶⁵ "Interspecies Democracies."

⁶⁶ Even our legal systems, and its laws uphold the division of things and persons. Animals are neither human or persons, nor a thing. As such, some have proposed animals ought to be re-categorised as legal persons. This however is a debated notion as 'personhood' is seen to be inextricably linked to human beings, because of their capacity for normative rationality. (e.g. see Korsgaard, "Personhood, Animals, and the Law," 2.) On the other hand, it has also been argued—interestingly enough—that an inherently relational African conception of personhood, *is* able to permit non-humans as persons despite its anthropocentric approach. (see Wareham, "Artificial Intelligence and African Conceptions of Personhood," para. "Anthropocentrism in Practice.")

⁶⁷ Milligan, "The Political Turn in Animal Rights," 7.

interspecies ethic implies—, whereby they have certain moral duties, responsibilities and obligations towards others,⁶⁸ i.e. either humans or nonhuman animals. Indeed, it has been argued that there are limits to animal advocacy.⁶⁹ Given our current political systems however, I believe it will be more fruitful to approach our current human-centred political system, with an ethical theory that is likewise focused around moral responsibilities of humans specifically.

Chapter 2. Virtue ethics

The emphasis on rights, values, duties, principles and consequentialist arguments among attempts to improve the human-nonhuman-animal-relationship have created a blind spot for the language of virtues.⁷⁰ In this chapter I will argue why accepting this ‘virtue blindness’ would be a waste for the success of the political turn.

A minimally decent virtue ethic

Some core concepts

Rather than questioning how duties require us to act or what actions would bring about the best consequences to determine what action is right, virtue ethics is concerned with the moral character of human beings.⁷¹ Instead of using a language of rights, it uses the language of virtues and vices in order to respond to moral questions.⁷² For a first approximation of the virtue ethical approach, I will mention Aristotle’s work. According to him, ethics is a study of the human good. The human good, he argued, is *eudaimonia*, or ‘happiness’. This understanding of happiness does not solely encapsulate mental states. As such, it is also often translated as ‘flourishing’; the highest human good because it is wanted for *itself*. It does not differ between individuals, but is a goal that is shared by all human beings as the type of beings they are. According to Aristotle every living being has its own function, where reason is the capacity that sets human beings apart. As such, he argued that in order to achieve this state of flourishing,

⁶⁸ In order to have the discussion about obligations of non-humans, we require an extensive ethological ‘theory of mind’ (see Korsgaard, “Personhood, Animals, and the Law,” 3), which is interesting to say the least. However, unfortunately also beyond the scope of this paper.

⁶⁹ Boyer, “The limits of Species Advocacy,” 123.

⁷⁰ van Wensveen, “The Emergence of Ecological Virtue Language,” 5.

⁷¹ To be clear, this is not so black and white. There are virtue ethicists who are interested in actions and consequences as well. For example Jamieson’s Green Virtues that I will refer to later in this chapter, can be identified as containing some traces of consequentialist thought as well. (e.g. see Frolov, “What Is a Green Virtue? Is This a Satisfying or Unsatisfying response to climate change?,” where she explains Jamieson’s loose form of virtue consequentialism) In short, virtue ethicists do not assign moral deliberation to moral character *alone*. Most importantly, virtue ethicists grant moral character of the agent moral primacy.

⁷² van Wensveen, “The Emergence of Ecological Virtue Language,” 3.

the moral agent should lead a life in line with this function of rational activity in accordance with excellence or virtue. Because living virtuously contributes intrinsically to a person's flourishing⁷³; i.e. the best state of character a person can possess.⁷⁴

There are different types of virtues in Aristotle's account; moral virtues and intellectual virtues. The former is a state of character that we do not possess by nature but that comes about as a result of habit, and the latter which we have from birth and requires growth through teaching.⁷⁵ In regard to moral virtues⁷⁶ we can first identify productive virtues that aim to bring something about (e.g. compassion to reduce suffering, and wonder to increase understanding). Second, we can identify moral virtues that are primarily expressive or receptive to increase understanding (e.g. gratitude and appreciation).⁷⁷ In regard to intellectual virtues, perhaps the most well-known and relevant intellectual virtue I will discuss here is '*phronesis*', or 'practical wisdom'. This intellectual virtue is concerned with deriving truths about right action. Depending on the situation in which a moral agent finds herself, it can differ what action or behaviour a moral virtue requires. Moreover, practical wisdom is not only concerned with attaining the good life for oneself, but also for humans in general.⁷⁸ Once one has acquired the ability of practical wisdom, it is not easily forgotten. In short, by keeping the highest good of flourishing in mind, the virtuous agent uses her practical judgment to act virtuously, in a way that any given situation requires.⁷⁹ Thus we can link virtues and practical wisdom, as "virtue makes the goal correct and practical wisdom makes what leads to it correct".⁸⁰

Because of this link between moral virtue and practical virtue, the importance of context is taken into account. Instead of using general principles or rules to apply to any context—which is argued to be cause for deficiencies of consequentialist and deontological accounts how they regard all different types of nonhuman animals—,⁸¹ determining the right action will depend on the isolated situation and is subject to situation-specific concerns, whatever those might be. Virtue ethics insists that we cannot adequately assess the ethical performance of an agent without information about their internal and external context.⁸² Having said that, acting in

⁷³ Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, xiii.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, xv.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, bk II.1.

⁷⁶ For reasons of simplicity I will henceforth use 'virtues', to indicate 'moral virtues'. Whenever I mean intellectual virtues, I will mention this explicitly. Likewise, I will use 'moral virtue' when I believe the emphasis is required.

⁷⁷ Sandler, "Environmental Virtue Ethics," 4.

⁷⁸ Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, bk. VI.5.

⁷⁹ Scott, "Ecological Responsibility as an Imperative and a Virtue," 92.

⁸⁰ Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, xvi.

⁸¹ Abbate, "Virtues and Animals: A Minimally Decent Ethic for Practical Living in a Non-Ideal World."

⁸² Nussbaum, "Virtue Ethics: A Misleading Category?," 542.

accordance with what virtue and practical wisdom require within a given context does not make one virtuous by itself. They must also have the right feelings about acting in accordance with virtue; “A virtuous person is disposed to respond to the right thing for the right reason, and in the right way, while also having the right desires and feelings about it”.⁸³ One becomes virtuous through habituation of acting according to virtues. This requires time and sustained commitment from the moral agent. This notion of acquiring virtues for character building in turn emphasises the focus that the language of virtues has on lasting change.⁸⁴

Not all virtue ethical approaches use all the same concepts. Nonetheless one can generally identify three main similarities between these approaches. Martha Nussbaum proposed that first of all, this approach is concerned with the agent. Second, it is concerned with motive an intention, emotion and desire; the character of the inner moral life, patterns of motive, reasoning behind acting a certain way. And third, it is not concerned with isolated acts of choice but the whole course of an agent’s moral life; its patterns of commitment, and also passion.⁸⁵ This section is by no means meant as a full account of Aristotle’s virtue ethic, or a review of all virtue ethicists’ work. Rather, I have mentioned the most important aspects of any virtue ethic, which likewise are relevant for my thesis.

Virtues and vices for animal ethics

For Aristotle, the most important virtues he discusses in *The Nicomachean Ethics* are courage, temperance, and justice.⁸⁶ Various environmental virtue ethicists have shed light on other virtues which they argue are needed for emphasising correct treatment of *all* living beings, including our attitude towards nature and nonhuman animals that in turn influences the composition of our human-nonhuman-animal-relationship. Here I will very briefly mention Sandler, Jamieson and Hursthouse’s virtue ethical approaches to give an idea of how environmental virtues are roughly understood.

Sandler, for example speaks of ‘environmental virtues’ and ‘environmental vices’. For him, virtues are environmentally responsive when it is an excellent character trait whose field includes some aspect of the natural world. Think of wonder towards nature, compassion towards animals, and restraint to overexploit natural resources. Environmental vices, on the other hand, are examples such as incuriousness towards nature, cruelty towards nonhuman

⁸³ Sandler, “Environmental Virtue Ethics,” 3.

⁸⁴ van Wensveen, “The Emergence of Ecological Virtue Language,” 7.

⁸⁵ Nussbaum, “Virtue Ethics: A Misleading Category?,” 538.

⁸⁶ Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, bk. III, IV, V.

animals, and recklessness in regard to using natural resources.⁸⁷ Hursthouse both mentions ‘old’ virtues and vices and proposes some ‘new’ ones as well. Old virtues and vices she mentions range from vices like greed, self-indulgence, short-sightedness, arrogance, and a lack of compassion, to old virtues such as proper humility and compassion.⁸⁸ She proposes the newer virtues of the emotion of wonder, and respect for nature.⁸⁹ Jamieson speaks of ‘Green Virtues’, which promote our end of minimizing environmental change. He uses a virtuous account because he argues that environmental change will have the best results by uncoupling behaviour from that of other, i.e. seeing behaviour as non-contingent on the behaviour of others, and does not require complex consequentialist mathematics. He tentatively mentions virtues such as loyalty, courage, persistence, humility, temperance, and a new virtue of mindfulness. However, he has not developed a list of what these exact virtues and vices should be, but rather wishes to urge other scholars to develop a more concrete list of Green Virtues.⁹⁰ In essence, all environmental virtue ethical accounts share a concern for nonhuman animals as part of living a flourishing life, by involving such virtues in our moral character development.⁹¹

It should be mentioned that none of these accounts, state that their choice of virtues should be the only virtues we must consider for our relationship towards the natural world, and our treatment of animals. They seem to serve as explanatory tools, rather than approaches that are set in stone. They are open to the creation of new virtues that problems specific to our time call for, e.g. Jamieson’s virtue of mindfulness that will help improve our behaviour as we appreciate the consequences of our actions remote to time and space.⁹² Importantly, it is precisely this richness and diversity of the language of virtues that sets it apart from other approaches. First, this richness ensures flexibility and prevents harmful extremes. It carries with it the promise of moral creativity.⁹³ Second, it helps us to characterise the relationship of humans with nature, which is especially helpful to animal ethical issues.⁹⁴ The challenges we face in regard to the treatment of nonhuman animals are diverse and complex. As such we are in need of a normative approach and language that reflects this richness and enables us to deal with varying complex moral dilemmas.

⁸⁷ Sandler, “Environmental Virtue Ethics,” 4.

⁸⁸ Hursthouse, “Environmental Virtue Ethics,” 155-158.

⁸⁹ Hursthouse, “Environmental Virtue Ethics,” 161-167.

⁹⁰ Driver, “Ideal Decision Making and Green Virtues”; Frolov, “What is a Green Virtue? Is This a Satisfying or Unsatisfying Response to Climate Change?”; Jamieson, “When Utilitarians Should Be Virtue Theorists,” 183.

⁹¹ Garner, “Indirect Duties, Virtue Ethics and Animals,” 67.

⁹² Jamieson, “When Utilitarians Should Be Virtue Theorists,” 182.

⁹³ van Wensveen, “The Emergence of Ecological Virtue Language,” 15.

⁹⁴ Sandler, “Environmental Virtue Ethics,” 5.

Likewise, I will not offer a concrete list of virtues for which I will argue. Rather I will use several virtues proposed by different virtue ethical scholars as a way to argue why the virtue ethical approach in general will benefit the political turn. In order to show how environmental moral virtues and practical wisdom would be used to come to a conclusion I will mention an example of Hursthouse. I will briefly mention her example of contributing to factory farming and animal testing.

Some practical guidance and more benefits

Many detailed descriptions of the goings on in factory farming have brought to light the extreme amounts of animal suffering.⁹⁵ By eating meat one is party to the structural imprisonment and exploitation of sentient beings. Hursthouse's consideration of the morality of eating meat is the following; we should think of it in terms of compassion, temperance, callousness, cruelty, greed, self-indulgence and honesty.⁹⁶ Through the virtue of honesty one cannot deny the existence of cruelty and animal suffering as a result of factory farming practices. Moreover it would be callous of us to do so. We cannot call ourselves compassionate if we are party to these practices, and in continuing to do so we are motivated by greed and self-indulgence. The intellectual virtue of practical wisdom shows us that the context wherein people eat meat is crucial to consider for our moral assessment of the action. For example, having meat for dinner parties, when we have the option of an abundance of alternative vegetarian food would be cruel.⁹⁷ It would be a different case when the consumption of meat is necessary for survival. For example no one would think Inuit peoples of lacking compassion by eating the only available option needed for survival.⁹⁸

In regard to using animals for cosmetic testing, Hursthouse has a similar way of using practical wisdom to decide on virtuous action. In her view, such experiments are cruel and follow the

⁹⁵ I myself will not go into detail here, but assume the reader has a sufficient understanding of practices in our current society that cause significant animal suffering. For a good overview of examples of animal treatment in various societal contexts, I urge people to consult Peter Singer's *Animal Liberation*.

⁹⁶ Hursthouse, "Applying Virtue Ethics to Our Treatment of the Other Animals," 141.

⁹⁷ For the purposes of my thesis, and as a brief disclaimer, I wish to give an indication of how making use of various moral virtues in combination with the intellectual virtue of practical wisdom, helps the individual moral agent decide on the best course of action in regard to the human-nonhuman-animal-relationship, given the context in which they find themselves. I will not discuss in detail what the relevant moral differences are between 'expensive' and 'cheap' meats, or meats that were sourced from less cruel practices than are generally found in animal agriculture, (e.g. sourcing meat from sea-fish, or hunting). Seeing as my goal here is to provide some sense of the decision making process—but not the importance of its conclusion per se—I believe it to be irrelevant to the development of my thesis. Also, to be clear, I do not claim a specific final goal of the animal advocacy movement should be kept in mind, but merely wish to substantiate the political turn's success regardless of their specific end goal, or *how* justice for animals will be achieved. This remains up for debate, even within a flourishing political turn.

⁹⁸ Hursthouse, "Applying Virtue Ethics to Our Treatment of the Other Animals," 142.

same line of consideration as being party to cruelty when it is not necessary; i.e. a virtuous agent would not do so. Using animals for medical testing is slightly different, as unlike eating meat, being party to medical testing is not a practice that one in their individual actions can refrain from. This practice is deeply rooted into our institutions.⁹⁹ Having said that, she emphasises that individual choices in the past have in the end created significant change; e.g. the individually insignificant actions of white people that have collectively influenced institutionalised oppression of black people. Much of the same can be said for medical experimentation; we can show our virtue through supporting change by signing petitions, supporting animal rights groups and voting for political parties who put animal issues on the political agenda.¹⁰⁰

She admits these are obvious and not particularly ‘exciting’ examples. However, she argues this is the way it should be. Precisely this aspect of virtue ethics makes it understandable for all people, and makes it promising for effecting actual change in the moral lives of human beings. Moreover, she states when we are inclined to ask what a virtuous person would do given the circumstances, the action itself does not necessarily have to merit praise. “It is not heroic courage but unexciting virtues that call us to such actions—amongst them, hope, patience, and modesty”.¹⁰¹ Acting virtuously applies to our everyday world as we find it. Surely such an approach is precisely what the success of the political turn depends upon?

Exactly this straightforward practical guidance for what to do as individual moral agents in our everyday lives makes a virtue ethical approach specifically suitable for the political turn. Similar to Hursthouse, Jamieson takes green virtues as practical guidance and moreover thinks they can and should be used for implementation stages for governmental bodies.¹⁰² As mentioned before, the political turn is characterised by an emphasis on pragmatic approaches to improve the human-nonhuman-animal-relationship.¹⁰³ Precisely an approach is needed that is both easily understandable for all, as well as sensitive to contextual circumstances in order to facilitate this. Luckily virtue ethics provides both. Not only is it a straightforward and obvious approach that lends itself well to a practical-orientation, but the richness of a language of virtues supports the importance of context specific considerations. As such, it provides promising practical guidance of our complex human-animal relationships in a non-ideal world.¹⁰⁴ And as

⁹⁹ Ibid., 147.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 148.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 150.

¹⁰² Frolov, “What Is a Green Virtue? Is This a Satisfying or Unsatisfying Response to Climate Change?,” 3.

¹⁰³ Milligan, “The Political Turn in Animal Rights,” 7.

¹⁰⁴ Abbate, “Virtues and Animals: A Minimally Decent Ethic for Practical Living in a Non-Ideal World.”

mentioned before, it does so while at the same time emphasising serious and lasting change because of its focus on habituation of virtues into one's character.¹⁰⁵

Besides, many have argued there cannot be certain principles or rules to guide action for any situation. If we were to accept this notion, then precisely the wisdom and sensitivity of a virtue ethical approach is indispensable to identify right action in a society with a plurality of values and justification.¹⁰⁶ It also does not depend on disputed understanding of moral status theories, and does not need concepts such as inherent worth from which to build further.¹⁰⁷ It is thus able to avoid these highly debated discussions of which the practical significance at this point seems doubtful. Changing focus of animal protection from inherent worth or intrinsic value to being preoccupied with the contribution it can make to human flourishing avoids such metaphysical demands.¹⁰⁸ As such virtue ethics might be better able to achieve moral breakthroughs, by providing a fresh outlook on outdated problems or dilemmas about questions as to whether trees have or rivers have rights.¹⁰⁹

Virtue ethics for the political turn: concerns and rebuttals

It is one thing to say that virtue ethical approaches are beneficial for the animal ethical discourse, or the environmental discourse at large. However, it is another thing to say that a virtue ethic would be beneficial for its political turn as well. I will now draw on Hursthouse's, Jamieson's, and Sandler's works to defend this contentious step and show that certain arguments that are used to express the benefits of virtue ethical approaches are precisely those from which the political turn would benefit. I will mention three concerns: first, that the language of virtues does not have as much political pull as a language of rights does. Second, that the inherent human-centredness of virtue ethical approaches leaves a bad anthropocentric taste. And third, that a moral theory that is concerned with the character of individual moral agents, cannot be used for changing political institutions.

Virtues with political strength?

Practical guidance

¹⁰⁵ van Wensveen, "The Emergence of Ecological Virtue Language," 7; Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, bk. II.1.

¹⁰⁶ Sandler, "Environmental Virtue Ethics," 8.

¹⁰⁷ Hursthouse, "Environmental Virtue Ethics," 166.

¹⁰⁸ Garner, "Indirect Duties, Virtue Ethics and Animals," 66.

¹⁰⁹ van Wensveen, "The Emergence of Ecological Virtue Language," 18.

In the previous section I mentioned that one of the particular attractive traits of virtue ethics for the political turn, is its practical guidance. Still, I will go further into the concern that virtue ethics is not able to provide practical guidance shortly again, as it is one of the concerns about this approach that it does not seem to be able to shake.

We can respond to this concern in two ways. Either by denying the truth of such a claim, or by comparing virtue ethics to alternative approaches and see whether they are indeed better equipped to deal with providing practical guidance. As for the former, I will once again mention Aristotle. He proposed virtue ethics not as merely theoretical, but thought rather it ought to be regarded as practical.¹¹⁰ It combines moral virtues with the intellectual virtue of practical wisdom in order for a moral agent to be able to decide on the right way of action. If indeed true, of course the claim that virtue ethics cannot provide practical guidance becomes obsolete, as the complete opposite is being argued; i.e. its practical guidance is what sets it apart from other normative frameworks. Namely, it is argued that virtues are conducive with right action. And moreover that it “helps identify or determine correct environmental actions and policies”.¹¹¹ I will discuss how I agree that virtue ethics can be linked to policy change in the last concern of this chapter, —among other things—by appealing to collective virtue.

Alternatively, we could examine whether other normative approaches that are often believed to have more practical punch, such as deontological and consequentialist theories, indeed are able to provide more practical guidance. I argue this is doubtful. Hursthouse also responds to this concern. She argues deontological and consequentialist accounts provide a similar level of action guidance, as all three normative theories tell us to refrain from certain actions—albeit for different reasons—such as animal testing. Roughly speaking deontological accounts would consider animal testing a violation of rights, consequentialist accounts see it as unnecessary suffering, and a virtue ethical account would consider it a cruel practice. Merely establishing that an action type is wrong, is not action guiding however.¹¹² It only tells us to refrain from such practices. Some might leave it at that to rebut that virtue ethics—*in contrast to other normative accounts*—is not action guiding. However, we can appeal again to the intellectual virtue of practical wisdom that sets this approach apart. Namely, because the end of this virtue is a kind of *doing*; right action.¹¹³ People with different roles in society are confronted with animal testing in different ways. Some aren't at all, or very indirectly. Whereas others like

¹¹⁰ Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, viii.

¹¹¹ Sandler, “Environmental Virtue Ethics,” 5.

¹¹² Hursthouse, “Applying Virtue Ethics to Our Treatment of the Other Animals,” 144.

¹¹³ Scott, “Ecological Responsibility as an Imperative and a Virtue,” 92.

medical scientists are confronted with animal testing very directly.¹¹⁴ Where other accounts stop at establishing what actions are wrong, virtue ethics helps decide agents what action is right and what a virtuous person would do in the particular circumstances they find themselves in. Making it very likely that virtue ethics is in fact more action guiding than alternative isolated normative frameworks, opposite to what is suggested.

Matter of justice

Another concern is that the language of virtues cannot bear the weight that correct treatment of animals is a matter of justice. As I mentioned before, the political turn is partly characterised by its strong emphasis on animal interests in the context of rights theories.¹¹⁵ Animal rights are often believed to be the best tools to come to justice. They would protect individual rights for those who cannot speak up for themselves; in this case nonhuman animals.¹¹⁶ Moreover, rights seem to immediately imply that the right treatment of nonhuman animals is a matter of justice.¹¹⁷ It is doubtful whether the language of virtues will be able to do the same. Indeed, most discussions within animal ethics have focused on animal rights,¹¹⁸ and this is no different within the political turn. A non-justice-based theory of morality is likely to fall foul of the lexical priority of justice.¹¹⁹

However, that does not mean that justice has no place in virtue ethics at all. Aristotle, who arguably is the most well-known scholar within the field of virtue ethics, devoted a whole book of his *The Nicomachean Ethics* to justice.¹²⁰ And although this book is often thought to be the least developed part of his *The Nicomachean Ethics*—and too different from his other virtues—, ¹²¹ its ideas are still defended to be important and a crucial part to his theory nonetheless.¹²² Moreover, Aristotle argued that if anything, virtue ethics is not a theoretical but rather a practical approach; for he regards ethics as a branch of politics.¹²³ Of course, Aristotle's sense of justice might give more weight to virtue ethics within the land of political theory than contemporary virtue ethicists—at least those I discuss in my thesis—do. To clarify, my aim by mentioning his virtue of justice is to rebut the intuition that virtue ethics in itself cannot have

¹¹⁴ Hursthouse, "Applying Virtue Ethics to Our Treatment of the Other Animals," 147.

¹¹⁵ Milligan, "The Political Turn in Animal Rights," 7.

¹¹⁶ Meijer, "Interspecies Democracies," 61.

¹¹⁷ Cochrane, *Animal Rights Without Liberation: Applied Ethics and Human Obligations*, 13.

¹¹⁸ van Wensveen, "The Emergence of Ecological Virtue Language," 5.

¹¹⁹ Garner, "Indirect Duties, Virtue Ethics and Animals," 67.

¹²⁰ Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, bk. V.

¹²¹ Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, xxiv.; Curzer, "Aristotle's Account of the Virtue of Justice," 207.

¹²² Curzer, "Aristotle's Account of the Virtue of Justice."

¹²³ Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, viii.

political significance outside of normative theorising. Of course, this is important since I aim to argue that virtue ethics should be considered for the success of the political turn. I admit, this goes beyond most contemporary virtue ethicist's work. However, this is in itself not enough to write off virtue ethics' significance to support the switch from normative to political theorising.

Not only would it be rash to write off virtue ethics position within political theory, but justice concerns do not solely report back to Aristotle's account of virtue ethics. Traces of such justice concerns are found in other-regarding virtues as well. Justice must not only be good for the agent themselves, but for others as well.¹²⁴ After all, many virtues—including justice—are self-regarding as well as regarding of our position towards others; e.g. compassion, empathy and so on. In chapter three I will further build on such virtues with other-regarding qualities when discussing that in order for the political turn to be truly successful, the animal advocacy movement should be first seen as a fully-fledged social justice movement.

Human-centred and anthropocentric?

Another concern of a virtue ethical account, for the political turn specifically, is that it is too human-centred and therefore anthropocentric. We are challenged to think about animals in other-than-anthropocentric terms, which is admittedly intimidating, "given the deeply and profoundly anthropocentric nature of the established order".¹²⁵ How then could virtue ethics be the preferred approach for taking the interests of nonhuman animals into account, when nonhuman-animals are seen as hierarchically less-than human beings?

The highest good for the human being according to virtue ethics is to flourish. Indeed this makes it egocentric. Having said that, it is not in itself egoistic. For example virtues such as temperance, must be good for the agent themselves as well as for the other.¹²⁶ Virtues such as compassion and empathy are good examples of virtues that are concerned with others as well.¹²⁷ I also believe it would be difficult to convincingly argue that further environmental virtues such as respect for nature and wonder could support an egoistic or anthropocentric view. Moreover, it is precisely the works that respond to the environmental crisis that use virtue language to avoid the arrogance of anthropocentrism; e.g. to stop being cruel in our human-nonhuman-animal-relationships, or to refrain from expressing greed by exploitation of natural resources.¹²⁸

¹²⁴ Ibid., xxiv.

¹²⁵ Calarco, "Being Toward Meat: Anthropocentrism, Indistinction, and Veganism," 419.

¹²⁶ Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, xxiv.

¹²⁷ Gruen, *Entangled Empathy: An Alternative Ethic for Our Relationships with Animals*; Ramp and Bekoff, "Compassion as a Practical and Evolved Ethic for Conservation."

¹²⁸ van Wensveen, "The Emergence of Ecological Virtue Language," 3.

Alternatively, we should not forget that centuries of ethical thinking have been human-centred. Nicely pointed out by Matthew Calarco, such animal subjection is continually reproduced in institutions such as the law, and education, but also in more subtle practices ranging from the construction of city areas that are hostile to animals, as well as the urge to break daily habits that associate us with animality, e.g. dealings with waste, embodiment, and the feminine.¹²⁹ Consequently our everyday use of the concept of rights, duties, obligations, and right and wrong, are as well.¹³⁰ Therefore I believe this concern of human-centredness in virtue ethics is exaggerated.¹³¹

A human centric approach such as virtue ethics admittedly sees only human beings as political agents and does not directly consider animals' political agency or interspecies democracies, as some philosophers argue is the only way to truly reach a just society.¹³² Although there might be some truth to this, I believe the current state of the animal ethical discourse is not yet ready for this debate to be successful. Of course this is why I argue we should in fact take a step back, and consider what virtue ethics compels us to do, what virtuous actions would look like, and how we ought to feel about those actions. Once my advice is taken to heart, I believe this would not only aid the political turn in general, but also help the endeavour of arguing for political animal agency.

I view virtue ethical approaches as a necessary step back to make our theoretical foundation of the whole movement stronger, rather than an alternative that rules out the possibility of interspecies democracies and political agency for animals. Luckily, the language of virtues is implicitly apparent in almost all ecologically sensitive philosophy, theology, or ethics in some way or another.¹³³ Moreover, it can also be found in Utilitarian and Kantian frameworks, which—Nussbaum has argued—shows that the strict distinction between these three main normative theories is exaggerated.¹³⁴ The language of virtues can latch onto other normative

¹²⁹ Calarco, "Being Toward Meat: Anthropocentrism, Indistinction, and Veganism," 419.

¹³⁰ Hursthouse, "Applying Virtue Ethics to Our Treatment of the Other Animals," 154.

¹³¹ I want to repeat here, that I do have some sympathy for the view that human-concepts will not be able to conduce truly fair considerations of our relationships towards nonhuman animals. Perhaps, indeed we must tweak our concepts or completely do away with them and realise new 'interspecies'-focused concepts to reconsider our moral and political obligations. Without undermining such an approach, I simply focus on this side of the debate: that accepts these human-centred-concepts and uses them with the assumption that this is not inherently wrong.

¹³² Meijer, "Interspecies Democracies"; Donaldson and Kymlicka, *Zoopolis: A Political Theory of Animal Rights*.

¹³³ van Wensveen, "The Emergence of Ecological Virtue Language," 5.

¹³⁴ Nussbaum, "Virtue Ethics: A Misleading Category?"

approaches unproblematically.¹³⁵ Exactly this makes it so promising as a theoretical underpinning for works within the political turn, and can support their success.

Individual character traits for institutional political change?

The character of the individual moral agent is subject for reflection. However, the structural change that the political turn wishes to bring about to truly achieve radically different and improved human-nonhuman-animal-relationships, will have to come about through institutional change at the political level. A concern with a virtuous political turn is therefore, that the importance of collective action and institutional change will not get sufficient attention within a virtuous framework.

Luckily, Aristotle argued that ethics—which was a virtue based approach for him—is already a branch of politics.¹³⁶ Jamieson’s account of Green Virtues that I mentioned earlier also examines the relationship between individual and collective action.¹³⁷ He states that it is easy to see that institutions play important roles in enabling virtue. Here it is important to recognise how societies and economies can either disable or enable the development of various virtues. For example the amount of transparency from businesses and governments can influence how much responsibility we take for our actions.¹³⁸ David Clowney also extends individual virtuous action and responsibility to group action and responsibility by discussing ‘shared virtue’ and ‘collective virtue’. He states that a shared virtue among a group means that some significant number of its member has that trait. A collective virtue means that the group has the trait as a group. This cannot be reduced to its individual members, even though it is true that their individual actions and attitudes add to the collective. This is important since institutionalised oppression of minorities cannot be reduced to the individual actors, and their attitudes and actions that do admittedly contribute to upholding such institutions.¹³⁹

Jamieson discusses a non-consequentialist problem of sorts, along these lines. Namely that an individual person cannot be condemned because of its imperceptible difference to the collective action. This would indeed be quite problematic if we wish to assign virtue ethical importance to collective structures and institutional at large. If we reframe this so that we understand

¹³⁵ Hursthouse, “Applying Virtue Ethics to Our Treatment of the Other Animals,” 154.

¹³⁶ Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, viii.; Again, as a disclaimer, I realise this is a controversial notion and not accepted by all—or even most—virtue ethicists. I believe it does not have to be the case for my argument; as I merely aim to show here that virtue ethical approaches should not be side tracked from the political discussion, based on the assumption of that virtues are inherently non-political.

¹³⁷ Frolov, “What Is a Green Virtue? Is This a Satisfying or Unsatisfying Response to Climate Change?”

¹³⁸ Jamieson, “When Utilitarians Should Be Virtue Theorists,” 182.

¹³⁹ Clowney, “Collective Environmental Virtue,” 319.

individual actions as actions that have potentially triggering consequences, we may avoid this problem.¹⁴⁰ Put differently, the added value of individual actions can eventually bring about big changes. For example the immense progress that has been made in regard to racism and institutionalised racism so far has not been made overnight. Just minimally decent behaviour can make big changes.¹⁴¹

It seems then, that not only individual agents with positions of power for example, but also institutions at large can be held accountable through a virtue ethical perspective. Luckily, this seems promising for the political turn. Of course, the individual virtuous moral agents will first, support institutions that move not only herself but others to act in accordance with environmental virtues that are beneficial for our human-nonhuman-animal-relationship. And second, the individual moral agent's life will also in part be shaped by these institutions; i.e. in the choices she makes, and is able to make in order to promote living an environmentally sensitive and virtuous life to others, and increasing the appeal of such a life to others. This makes it clear that achieving institutional change is crucial from a virtue ethical perspective and that this approach can shed light on this issue, even though its starting point for reflection is the individual moral character.¹⁴² And that vice versa, public opinion creates the platform and opportunity for reform.¹⁴³ From this I conclude that the political turn will not face a problem of being able to affect change at the political level, at the hand of virtue ethics.

Having said that, I admit it is entirely possible that certain people in society will bear more responsibility in affecting this political change to improve the human-nonhuman-animal relationship. Let us consider Hursthouse's example of the roles different actors play in combatting institutionalised racism: "In this context, the role that lawyers play in combatting the racism entrenched in the legal systems will mostly have to be played by scientists within the set of institutions that enshrine the practice, but it is up to the rest of us, collectively, to make enough noise to get more of them concerned about bringing about changes".¹⁴⁴ Some people might also find themselves in better positions to affect changes to oppressive conditions than others. I think the beauty of this approach, which Hursthouse here is hinting at as well, that there is both room for individual differences and 'personalised' virtuous behaviour, as well as

¹⁴⁰ Frolov, "What Is a Green Virtue? Is This a Satisfying or Unsatisfying Response to Climate Change?," 5.

¹⁴¹ Hursthouse, "Applying Virtue Ethics to Our Treatment of the Other Animals," 150.

¹⁴² Clowney, "Collective Environmental Virtue," 330.

¹⁴³ Stallwood, "Are We Smart Enough to Know When to Take the Political Turn for Animals?," 289.

¹⁴⁴ Hursthouse, "Applying Virtue Ethics to Our Treatment of the Other Animals," 149.

collective virtuous behaviour at an institutional level that will benefit everyone, humans and nonhuman animals alike.

Virtue ethics as an alternative or support?

In this chapter I showed what a virtue ethical perspective could offer the political turn and why I believe the political turn in the end will be much better off if a virtuous perspective were considered more seriously. Let me emphasise here that the aim of my thesis is to provide a way that will help the animal ethical discourse and its political turn to be more successful than it has been thus far. I aim to do so without undermining other approaches that focus on moral rights for animals as a way to assert legal rights and effectuate political change. Similarly, Sandler has argued that virtues are needed *in addition* to other normative frameworks; i.e. either the utilitarian, deontological or contractarian. However, some also argue that right action should be explicated *through* virtues.¹⁴⁵ Here I also do not mean to undermine such an approach. What I argue for however is that a virtue ethical approach should be considered to serve as a very necessary underpinning for current works within the political turn that assume a rights framework. In this thesis I take a step back to reflect on the current state of the political turn, before entrusting its success to moral rights alone. I am inclined to agree with Louke van Wensveen,¹⁴⁶ that through using the language of virtues we have a good chance at achieving moral breakthroughs.

Chapter 3. Animal advocacy as a social justice movement

In chapter two I have offered a preliminary sketch of virtue ethics' advantages for the animal advocacy movement—i.e. the diversity and richness in the language of virtues, its ability to give practical guidance in a complex non-ideal world, and its underpinning of long term commitments. Consequently, I argued virtue ethics deserves more attention in regard to thinking about our human-nonhuman-animal-relationships. Although I hope to already have offered an indication that virtue ethics shows potential for the political turn, I admit more work needs to be done. In this chapter, I will do so by arguing how virtue ethics will aid the animal rights movement to be embraced as a fully-fledged social justice movement; i.e. precisely what is needed for the political turn's success.

¹⁴⁵ Sandler, "Environmental Virtue Ethics," 8.

¹⁴⁶ van Wensveen, "The Emergence of Ecological Virtue Language," 18.

The strength of social movements

In order for animal advocacy—or more specifically the animal rights movement—to effectuate real changes in our human-nonhuman-animal-relationships at the political level, it should first take the political turn from being a moral crusade, to being a fully-fledged social movement.¹⁴⁷ The efforts of animal rights advocacy are currently narrowly understood as a moral crusade rather than a social movement with a political mission and strategic objectives.¹⁴⁸ Donaldson and Kymlicka similarly find that this switch in mindset has been slow, and admit that even ‘the progressive Left’ has trouble including animal rights as an additional social justice issue of similar magnitude.¹⁴⁹ Undoubtedly, this image of the animal rights movement should change before we can expect the political turn to be successful. As I explained in chapter one, the political turn is primarily characterised by its emphasis on finding pragmatic approaches, and by its emphasis on justice. And that as such it has been approached through the context of rights theories.¹⁵⁰ It seems only logical to first assert the animal rights movement is a social justice movement, before we assume that taking the political turn will be successful. Of course, how could we accept the notion of animal rights and agree that all institutions (political or otherwise) that violate them should consequently change—in quite radical ways one might add—before having acknowledged the severity of animals’ oppression? I will argue that virtue ethical insights can aid people to realise that animal advocacy should indeed be understood as a social justice movement.

Stallwood defines a social movement as “A collective, organised, sustained, and non-institutional challenge to authorities, power holders, or cultural beliefs and practices”.¹⁵¹ She continues to say that “by that definition, the modern animal rights movement is a social movement in terms of being collectively organised and sustained, but it has yet to effectively develop the capacity for challenging authority in the political mainstream, as full-fledged social movements do”.¹⁵² I argue that it is crucial for the animal rights movement to be recognised in their capacity to challenge political authority. Only then, can we expect the political turn of the animal ethical debate to be realised, and moreover to be successful in doing so. Framing animal rights as a social movement sheds light on animal issues concerning public policy, legislation, and law enforcement and highlights “the essential and unavoidable stage for institutional

¹⁴⁷ Stallwood, “Are We Smart Enough to Know When to Take the Political Turn for Animals?,” 280.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 283.

¹⁴⁹ Donaldson and Kymlicka, “Animal Rights, Multiculturalism, and the Left,” 116.

¹⁵⁰ Milligan, “The Political Turn in Animal Rights,” 7.

¹⁵¹ Stallwood, “Are We Smart Enough to Know When to Take the Political Turn for Animals?,” 283.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 283.

change”.¹⁵³ To build Stallwoods’ argument further, I argue that it is crucial to consider the challenges that other social justice movements face and to compare them to the animal rights movement. Through exposing shared structures of oppression, domination and hierarchy, we can learn from these interrelated forms of violence, and consequently aid the political turn of the animal ethical debate.

Of course, the goal of my thesis is to assert that we ought to consider a virtue ethical approach to the political turn more seriously. Therefore, I will show what role virtue ethics can play in increasing the recognition of the animal rights movement as a fully-fledged social justice movement. Before doing so, I will first mention some previous works on the intersectionality of different social justice movements. Works that aim to underpin the view that nonhuman animal oppression and human oppression are one and the same.¹⁵⁴

Intersectionality of social movements

Social justice movements specialise in one type of domination and oppression that a certain minority is subject to, and aim to bring its injustice to light. Social justice movements therefore demand more recognition at the political level and radical changes in oppressive institutions. More and more scholars have tried to emphasise that these oppressions cannot be understood as isolated events, but rather that various social injustices are interlinked through shared structures of oppression; i.e. “intersectionality”. “This stresses that groups, movements, and people often have multiple experiences of oppression related to their different axes of identity, such as ability, gender, sexuality, race, class, age, nationality, and religion”.¹⁵⁵ As such it is both a methodology as well as a theory that considers the overlap and interactions between social relationships. Intersectionality emphasises that oppression is related by systems of domination.¹⁵⁶

The origins of intersectionality are found in Black feminists’ attempts to map tension between race and gender.¹⁵⁷ Namely, women are faced with more problems than men, and this increases further when she is also a Black woman, a lesbian and/or has disabilities.¹⁵⁸ These intersections between social movements have long been suggested and widely accepted. The efforts to extend

¹⁵³ Ibid., 289.

¹⁵⁴ Gigliotti, “The Struggle for Compassion and Justice through Critical Animal Studies,” 190.

¹⁵⁵ Nocella, White, and Cudworth, “Introduction: The Intersections of Critical Animal Studies and Anarchist Studies for Total Liberation,” 10.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 10.

¹⁵⁷ Cudworth, “Intersectionality, Species, and Social Domination,” 93.

¹⁵⁸ Nocella, White, and Cudworth, “Introduction: The Intersections of Critical Animal Studies and Anarchist Studies for Total Liberation,” 11.

such considerations to nonhuman animal issues have been met with more resistance. Efforts have been made to show intersections between feminism and nonhuman animals, between race and nonhuman animals, and between disability, environment, and animal justice.¹⁵⁹ It is crucial for us to critique how these institutionalised oppressions and internalised ideologies—e.g. racism as whiteness-as-norm, speciesism as humans-as-norm—influence our consciousness and relationships with human beings as well as nonhuman animals.¹⁶⁰

Perhaps this intersectionality of all social justice issues is most prominently recognised by anarchist thought, “which opposes all systems of domination and oppression such as racism, ableism, sexism, anti-LGBTQIA, ageism, sizeism, government, competition, capitalism, colonialism, imperialism and punitive justice, and promotes direct democracy, collaboration, interdependency, mutual aid, diversity, peace, transformative justice and equity”.¹⁶¹ While I will not focus on anarchist political theory specifically, it is an interesting socio-political theory that emphasises the importance of intersectionality of all movements, and moreover uses this insight to argue for radical practical changes in our current political communities—something it has in common with the political turn.

At the same time we should realise that the battle against racism, speciesism, the veal industry or the egg industry is not the same, and that specialisation of social movements also aids their effectiveness in bringing about change.¹⁶² However, uncovering the similarities between various social movements is needed to realise we are fighting the same fight against institutionalised oppression, and that these movements can help each other. Here, I will briefly mention how intersections with sexism and racism have been put forward to aid the animal rights movement.

Intersections with sexism

Feminist scholars have argued that animal advocacy should be embraced as a feminist issue because of the links between the oppression of marginalised humans and animals—i.e. intersectional elements.¹⁶³ They have extended the understanding of social justice, through connecting the network of oppression with speciesism, sexism, classism, racism.¹⁶⁴ Most

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 11.

¹⁶⁰ Harper, “Connections: Speciesism, Racism, and Whiteness As the Norm,” 75.

¹⁶¹ Nocella, White, and Cudworth, “Introduction: The Intersections of Critical Animal Studies and Anarchist Studies for Total Liberation,” 7.

¹⁶² Kemmerer, “Introduction,” 27.

¹⁶³ Deckha, “Animal Advocacy, Feminism and Intersectionality,” 48.

¹⁶⁴ Kemmerer, “Introduction,” 6.

notably, by the fact that both women and nonhuman animals have historically been silenced and oppressed by the dominant group's voice; men, or human beings at large. Put differently, their voices are similarly silenced by their respective ideological systems of sexism and speciesism.¹⁶⁵ The feminist care view restores this by arguing it is crucial to understand animal languages and communicate with them. Which of course entails listening to 'different voices' rather than just the dominant.¹⁶⁶ Thereby characteristically combatting oppressive ideologies by social justice movements. In order to do so, it focuses on feminine concepts such as care, responsibility, and relationships, rather than male concepts of rights and rules.¹⁶⁷ For example, Lori Gruen offers a care ethical account for the moral consideration of our human-nonhuman-animal-relationship and offers her account of 'entangled empathy'.¹⁶⁸ While unveiling the intersectionality of shared oppression of institutions that silence the voices of both women and nonhuman-animals, they propose such feminist values should be adopted. Not only should they inform personal relationships but also public discourses on public policy and institutional change.¹⁶⁹

Intersections with racism

Much like the similarities between feminist struggles and animal advocacy, oppression of nonhuman animals can also be linked with that of humans through systemic racism. For example, poorer, non-white neighbourhoods are more vulnerable to large corporations dumping their externalities such as animal waste. Ecofeminists have argued these environmentalist and racist concerns are therefore inextricably linked.¹⁷⁰ Furthermore, we find human rights violations in slaughter houses and other labours that are linked to animal food production, "e.g. acid-spattering, arms torn off, lost hands and death".¹⁷¹ These jobs are also mostly filled by non-white workers of lower socio-economic status. Moreover, those with lower socio-economic status are less likely to switch to a healthy vegan diet. "Poorer neighbourhoods where people likely live without transportation, often do not have health-food stores with vegan options—or even supermarkets with fresh vegetables—let alone organic produce".¹⁷² With these brief examples—on both the intersectionality with systemic sexism and racism—I will

¹⁶⁵ Donovan, "Interspecies Dialogue and Animal Ethics: The Feminist Care Perspective," 210.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 208.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 209.

¹⁶⁸ Gruen, "Entangled Empathy: An Alternative Ethics for Our Relationships With Animals"; Jenni, "Review of 'Entangled Empathy: An Alternative Ethic for Our Relationships With Animals.'"

¹⁶⁹ Donovan, "Interspecies Dialogue and Animal Ethics: The Feminist Care Perspective," 219.

¹⁷⁰ Kemmerer, "Introduction," 15.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 22.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 22.

offer how the virtue ethical approach will aid the recognition of these intersectional elements and in turn aid the political turn. First however, I will consider why the animal advocacy movement thus far has not been accepted as a fully-fledged social justice movement, given these intersectional elements.

Challenges to recognise animals rights as a social justice movement

Over the years the progressive Left has exposed the unjust treatment of minorities in society and advocated for radical change to oppressive institutions that enable such domination. Movements have focused on gender equality, gay rights, the disability movement,¹⁷³ and the Black Lives Matter movement to name a few.¹⁷⁴ The animal rights movement however, has yet to be fully accepted under the label of ‘social justice struggles’.¹⁷⁵ Scholars have offered different explanations of why this could be the case.¹⁷⁶ I will consider Stallwoods’, and Donaldson and Kymlicka’s view specifically, as they frame their own academic work within the political turn and have thus have been forced to consider what exactly is impeding the success of their own work.

In order to make sense of this, Stallwood, and Donaldson and Kymlicka considered a multitude of concerns that might underlie the impediment of this recognition. I will discuss four central concerns. First, the difference between animal advocacy and other social movement in regard to the nature of their protagonists and beneficiaries. For example, the difference between animal advocacy and other social movements in regard to the benefits that are enjoyed by human beings as a result from exploiting nonhuman animals. Second, the concern for ‘displacement’. Third, the concern for ‘trivialisation’. And fourth, the concern that animal advocacy perpetuates racial hierarchies and upholds racial bias. I will respond to these concerns from the virtue ethical perspective I sketched earlier. By doing so I argue that virtue ethical approach is crucial for enabling the recognition of animal advocacy as a social justice movement, and thus for the success of the political turn.

¹⁷³ Donaldson and Kymlicka, “Animal Rights, Multiculturalism, and the Left,” 116.

¹⁷⁴ “About Black Lives Matter”, Black Lives Matter, accessed June 18, 2020, <https://blacklivesmatter.com/about/>.

¹⁷⁵ Donaldson and Kymlicka, “Animal Rights, Multiculturalism, and the Left,” 116.

¹⁷⁶ Let me quickly respond to the idea that there is a disanalogy between animal rights and human rights, such as gay rights and so on. Throughout this thesis I do not make the claim that animal rights are, or should be, completely similar to human rights, either in their make-up, or their execution at the political level. Rather, in arguing that animal advocacy—and the animal rights movement more specifically—should be embraced as a social justice movement, I wish to emphasise their similar importance to being recognised as a social justice issue. Only then have we created the equal platform to seriously consider whether this means nonhuman animals indeed require *legal* animal rights, and if so, which ones. I will emphasise again, that my thesis is built around the concern that discussing animal rights given the debate’s current state, is inefficient.

Concerns and virtue ethical rebuttals

The nature of protagonists and beneficiaries

Usually social justice movements are mobilised by protagonists who are the agents of their own change. For example the issue of sexism is raised by women, and their aspiration to end sexist practices and radically reform or abolish institutions that uphold sexist ideologies, will benefit the protagonists themselves, namely women. Not only does feminism assert benefits for women, but also for men—regardless of whether they are allies in the feminist movement themselves—as they will likewise benefit from non-sexist institutions. The contradictory position of power that men experience, namely has the downside—often referred to as ‘toxic masculinity’—that they are similarly stigmatised, penalised and disadvantaged by the pressure to live up to certain masculine traits that are associated with power.¹⁷⁷ Thus, abolishing sexism, will benefit the protagonists of the movement, and both women and men more generally. However, in the animal advocacy movement this is different. The protagonists that lead this movement, are not even of the same species as those who will benefit, namely nonhuman animals.¹⁷⁸ The same issue is raised for environmentalist ethics, although it is argued that promoting a healthier environment and combatting climate change will indirectly benefit human beings too.

In fact, the protagonists might in this case even have to give up some benefits. Or course, a key difference between animal advocacy and other social movements is that it is more likely that human beings will have to relinquish some of the benefits that they have enjoyed at the hand of nonhuman animals’ exploitation. Humans enjoy copious amounts of benefits that range from using animals for food, or wearing clothing like leather jackets and fur coats, using safe medicines which have been tested on animals, or—depending on the particular goal of the movement—even up to enjoying benefits of using animals for human entertainment such as in circuses, zoo’s, or even as pets. It is easy to see, that fully embracing the animal rights movement will have vast consequences for the human-nonhuman-animal-relationship as we know it and have grown accustomed to. This will most likely entail that people should make vast and inconvenient lifestyle changes.¹⁷⁹ And these personal sacrifices in relation to nonhuman animals, are arguably bigger than the sacrifices one has to make to be in full cooperation with, say, gay rights or disability rights.¹⁸⁰ I believe this to be true, no matter which

¹⁷⁷ Kaufman, “Men, Feminism, and Men’s Contradictory Experiences of Power,” 143.

¹⁷⁸ Stallwood, “Are We Smart Enough to Know When to Take the Political Turn for Animals?,” 287.

¹⁷⁹ Donaldson and Kymlicka, “Animal Rights, Multiculturalism, and the Left,” 117.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 118.

final goal of the animal rights movement is kept in mind; i.e. not only total liberation, but arguably also welfarist reforms will ask human beings to relinquish many of their personal luxuries.

I argue virtue ethics grants several interesting insights that should be considered here. The deeper people's understanding is, the less fear there is of losing the particular pleasure of benefits they are expected to give up.¹⁸¹ In line with this, let us consult some virtues which I have discussed earlier. Virtues such as Hursthouse's respect for nature and the emotion wonder would encourage people to deepen their understanding of animals' oppression. The virtue of honesty would compel us to be truthful with ourselves about the impact of these oppressions and about the role we as individuals play in causing them or contributing to upholding the institutions that enable them. And more generally, Sandler's environmental virtues emphasise the intertwined flourishing of the environment, nonhuman animals and human beings,¹⁸² and Clowney's collective environmental virtues would shed light on the collective responsibility we have to take such institutionalised injustice towards nonhuman animals seriously.¹⁸³ Thus in short, virtues that require openness towards the interests of other beings and ecological sensitivity will deepen our understanding of nonhuman animals' oppression. Making relinquishing of benefits easier for the moral agent.

Furthermore, I have discussed the inclinations the virtuous agent must have about the moral virtues, and towards acting in accordance with what virtue asks of us. Namely, that merely acting in accordance with what moral virtue and practical wisdom requires from us in a particular situation, are not sufficient criteria for a virtuous character. One ought to have the right desires and feelings about acting virtuously as well.¹⁸⁴ Moreover, people who are committed to environmentally sensitive virtues take pleasure in the activities that it requires—e.g. separating waste, refraining from wearing animal skins or eating their flesh—or at the very least will not find them as burdensome.¹⁸⁵ Not only will virtue ethics support the agent's journey towards recognition of the animal rights movement by deepening their understanding and inclinations to act right, it will also benefit them after all. Acting in accordance with virtue is conducive with one's own flourishing. This aspect makes it easier for the agent to commit to living a life and acting according to moral virtue, as it “[benefits] its possessor by focusing her

¹⁸¹ Stallwood, “Are We Smart Enough to Know When to Take the Political Turn for Animals?,” 281.

¹⁸² Sandler, “Environmental Virtue Ethics,” 7.

¹⁸³ Clowney, “Collective Environmental Virtue,” 315.

¹⁸⁴ Sandler, “Environmental Virtue Ethics,” 3.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 7.

on what is truly valuable in life”.¹⁸⁶ With the virtue ethical perspective, it becomes clear that the strict protagonist-beneficiary-distinction of the animal advocacy movement is exaggerated. These aspects of a virtue ethical approach show promise for helping people to recognise animal advocacy and the animal rights movement as a social movement.

Displacement & Trivialisation

The following concerns I will discuss are both concerned that advocating for animal rights will harm the struggles of other disadvantaged groups.¹⁸⁷ In other words, that the animal rights movement impedes the success of other social justice movements.

First, it is thought that embracing the animal rights movement will be cause for displacement; i.e. “the concern that if the Left commits time and resources to animals it will come at the expense of time and resources devoted to, say, fighting racism”.¹⁸⁸ However this seems obviously false as struggles for justice are not a zero-sum game. It is precisely the intersectional analysis that shows the interconnectedness of shared ideologies of domination, relying on similar processes of exclusion, silencing, paternalism and coercion.¹⁸⁹ By showing which aspects of a certain struggle or specialised social movement overlap with another movement, one only creates additional evidence of the unjust patterns and oppressive institutions that exist within the same society. Social movements help unveil other oppressions, and strengthen their shared goal of creating just societies and political communities.¹⁹⁰ Thereby only increasing the effectiveness of one’s advocacy to different movements.

Not only unjust patterns and shared experiences of wrongful domination and oppression will create evidence for the entanglement of all social movements. Emphasising virtue ethics’ focus on character traits of the agent will ensure that acting in the right way is not isolated to one single type of injustice. Devoting one’s life to incorporating the moral virtues into one’s character through habituation, grants moral agents the opportunity to act right in ever changing situations. As explicated before, moral virtue is not connected to one type of action, rather it provides the moral agent with practical guidance for any situation through making use of practical wisdom. When social movements are compared, and are additionally identified as having intersectional elements, the moral agent who has cultivated the relevant moral virtues, would be even more equipped to act right in the face of a different—yet similar—type of

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 6.

¹⁸⁷ Donaldson and Kymlicka, “Animal Rights, Multiculturalism, and the Left,” 118.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 118.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 119.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 119.

institutionalised injustice. It seems that through cultivating virtuous traits by supporting the animal rights movement, then, only inclines the moral agent to support other movements as well. Rather than abstaining from committing one's time to other injustices.

Second, it is thought that embracing the animal rights movement will be cause for trivialisation; i.e. "that including animals in the Left's pantheon of just causes will diminish the very currency of justice and thereby erode the moral seriousness with which human injustices are treated".¹⁹¹ This concern can be understood as a philosophical claim that lessens the moral significance of human beings, or as an empirical claim that supporters of the animal rights movement will diminish their commitment to other injustices towards human beings. If we understand it as a philosophical claim, it would only hold force if we are committed to species narcissism and human superiority. How else, would supporting animal rights be insulting to humans? The very concern that justice for animals will somehow weaken a commitment to justice for human beings, is in itself a human-egoistic statement that exercises human superiority over the moral significance of nonhuman-animals.

I believe precisely a virtue ethical response is also in order with such a concern. As I have argued before, although the virtue ethical approach is human-centred and ego-centric, it is not egoistic in itself.¹⁹² As such, it can take others' moral significance seriously, while at the same time accepting that one—as a human being—is the centre for normative decision making and has a certain moral significance in their capacity as moral agents. Similarly, nonhuman animal justice issues can be considered without lessening the moral significance of humans. It is for example true that through other-regarding virtues of empathy, and compassion one is inclined to put the interests of others before our own.¹⁹³ And of course similarly virtues of respect for nature and the emotion of wonder imply that we in our capacity as human beings should place ourselves in a humble position towards other living beings. While doing so however, the human being—or other human justice issues—does not lose moral significance, just because a certain virtue is assigned to other beings as well.

As an empirical concern, it is simply not true. "Those who recognize that animals possess valued traits and emotions are also more likely to accord equality to human outgroups. Reducing the status divide between humans and animals helps to reduce prejudice and to

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 119.

¹⁹² Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, xxiv.

¹⁹³ Hursthouse, "Applying Virtue Ethics to the Treatment of the Other Animals," 154; Sandler, "Environmental Virtue Ethics," 3.

strengthen belief in equality among human groups”.¹⁹⁴ Again, this not only shows this empirical concern of trivialisation is unrealistic, it also asserts that a virtue ethical approach is specifically relevant to consider. Here I could mention Hursthouse’s and Sandler’s virtues again, but instead I will mention Gruen’s feminist care ethics.

She offers the concept of ‘entangled empathy’, as “a type of caring perception focused on attending to another’s experience of wellbeing. An experiential process involving a blend of emotion and cognition in which we recognize we are in relationships with others and are called upon to be responsive and responsible in these relationships by attending to another’s needs, interests, desires, vulnerabilities, hopes, and sensitivities”.¹⁹⁵ Although she is more understood as a care ethicist rather than a virtue ethicist, in term of how she approaches the concept of empathy, I do not believe it is misplaced to regard it as relevantly comparable to a moral virtue of empathy. Seeing as she argues empathy “recognizes connection with and understanding of the circumstances of the other [and] is directed to the wellbeing of another,”¹⁹⁶ it seems comparable to the moral virtue of compassion for example. Moreover, she states that empathy does not involve abandoning one’s own attitudes, perspective, and commitments. This would allow for the moral agent to be empathetic towards other beings, in such a way that both they have incorporated it into their individual character through habituation, of doing what the specific situation asks for.

Such other-regarding virtues like empathy and compassion, of course do not extend merely to nonhuman animals but also to human beings. The virtuous agent who acts according to what empathy and compassion asks of them in supporting the animal rights movement, will have made these virtues a part of their character through habituation. It is only logical then, that these inclinations to do what is right according to virtue, and to support a social justice movement that is focused on nonhuman animals, will also add to the inclinations of said moral agent to support all other social justice movements that are focused on human beings. Therefore, the concern that embracing the animal rights movement as a social justice movement will be cause for trivialisation—or displacement—I believe is unrealistic, plays into human supremacy and is therefore unfounded.

¹⁹⁴ Donaldson and Kymlicka, “Animal Rights, Multiculturalism, and the Left,” 120.

¹⁹⁵ Gruen, *Entangled Empathy: An Alternative Ethic for Our Relationships with Animals*, 3.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 45.

Upholding racial hierarchies and racial bias

The final concern for recognising animal rights as a social justice movement I will discuss is that its endeavours will operate to relegitimise racial hierarchies. Animal issues run the risk of being discussed in such a way that plays into whiteness-as-the-norm,¹⁹⁷ and assumptions that Western cultures are uniquely humane, while simultaneously stigmatising racial minorities as barbaric.¹⁹⁸ Of course, minorities' practices in regard to their human-nonhuman-animal-relationships have been stigmatised before; e.g. indigenous people seal hunting, Jews' ritual slaughter, Chinese live-animal markets, and Koreans eating dogs to name a few.¹⁹⁹ When expressing distaste for religious practices through which for example a Muslim community kills nonhuman animals, speciesism is used as a means to radicalise a certain minority as barbaric as opposed to the "White" and "Western" norm.²⁰⁰ Of course, it is crucial for the animal rights movement to recognise these inconsistencies and ask how systemic injustice plays a role in our view of various human-nonhuman-animal-relationships. The injustices done to animals in "Western" animal agriculture systems should not be dismissed or overlooked as more just. Interestingly, making use of such focus on minorities is not used as a tactic by animal rights groups. They have rather focused their energy on combatting animal agriculture systems and animal exploitation at the hand of human beings and our institutions at large.²⁰¹

Moreover, we should not perpetuate racial biases whilst advocating for nonhuman animals. For example, it should not be assumed that everyone has similar opportunities to commit to animal advocacy and make certain lifestyle changes it requires. Hursthouse also discusses this issue and admits that not everyone is in the same position to aid the animal rights movement.²⁰² Here, particularly virtue ethics is able to respect these differences among moral agents, as they are from different walks of life. Of course, differences in socio-economic status will make it more difficult for certain minorities to act right, and do what animal advocacy requires us to do. "Blindness to one's own privilege and ignorance of the struggles that others face (in a homophobic, racist, ageist, ableist, sexist society) are major impediments to social justice activism".²⁰³ Like I mentioned before, people with lower socio-economic status, who live in non-white neighbourhoods will be less likely to have access to, or have the means to make

¹⁹⁷ Harper, "Connections: Speciesism, Racism, and Whiteness as the Norm," 75.

¹⁹⁸ Donaldson and Kymlicka, "Animal Rights, Multiculturalism, and the Left," 121.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 121.

²⁰⁰ Harper, "Connections: Speciesism, Racism, and Whiteness as the Norm," 75.

²⁰¹ Donaldson and Kymlicka, "Animal Rights, Multiculturalism, and the Left," 122.

²⁰² Hursthouse, "Applying Virtue Ethics to Our Treatment of the Other Animals," 149.

²⁰³ Kemmerer, "Introduction," 28.

certain lifestyle changes, e.g. to adopt a vegan lifestyle in the name of animal advocacy.²⁰⁴ The moral agent however, decides what accounts a right action given the particular circumstances. Thus virtue ethics is able to respect that we cannot expect everyone to contribute to this movement in the same way. Yet again, getting us one step closer to the animal rights movement being embraced as a proper social justice movement.

Virtue ethics in practice: using intersectionality successfully

Through using virtue ethical elements I have shown how these concerns against embracing the animal rights movement as a social justice movement do not hold force. In fact, I have shown that recognising animal issues as a social movement not only helps the moral agent and nonhuman animals to reach their state of flourishing, but also aids other social movements in their own endeavours. I will expand on this latter point even further and offer some brief practical insights into how the animal rights movement would support other social justice movements.

Again, let us reconsider the political turn's focus on pragmatic approaches that focus on justice. In case of the latter, I have argued that virtue ethics is important to consider in underpinning the intersectionality of social justice movements and thereby helping the animal rights movement to be recognised as one. As for the former, it is crucial when supporting other social movements, animal advocates should stay mindful of their role and go about it in a respectful manner. "[It is not about] vegan activists going to an LGBTTIQ parade and promoting veganism; it involves being at other social movement's events in order to fully support them and to be in solidarity with them."²⁰⁵ Other practical examples of animal advocacy for example are going to local community meetings, joining political parties, attending political conventions and so on. In short, getting your voice—and thus the interests of nonhuman animals—heard.²⁰⁶

With these very practical examples I aim to show the importance of taking a broad view of political coalition and solidarity around shared systems of oppression,²⁰⁷ as I argued this is crucial for the political turn to be successful. Individual changes that people make to their lifestyles arguably are not enough for political change on their own. Having said that however, individual virtuous actions will be able to affect the behaviours of others through virtuous role

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 22.

²⁰⁵ Nocella, White, and Cudworth, "Introduction: The Intersections of Critical Animal Studies and Anarchist Studies for Total Liberation," 12.

²⁰⁶ Stallwood, "Are We Smart Enough to Know When to Take the Political Turn for Animals?," 299.

²⁰⁷ Nocella, White, and Cudworth, "Introduction: The Intersections of Critical Animal Studies and Anarchist Studies for Total Liberation," 10.

modelling and are of course a part of the public opinion. Public opinion makes public policy reform and laws possible.²⁰⁸ Thus when individual—and collective—virtues are embraced by the public more, it will consequently aid actual policy reform. Thus, I conclude that embracing animal advocacy as a social justice movement will not only aid the political turn of the animal ethical debate, but also in the end will aid other social justice movements. For lack of a better animal-friendly-pun: to hit two birds with one stone.

Conclusion

In conclusion, in this thesis I have argued that a virtue ethical approach deserves more attention among the predominantly moral-rights focused works within the political turn of the animal ethical debate. These theoretical efforts that have characterised the political turn thus far have not been able to successfully underpin or effectuate radical political change to our human-nonhuman-animal-relationships. Begging the question whether the animal advocacy debate in its current state is ready to take the political turn, and to do so successfully. I did not argue against the legitimacy of emphasising the importance of moral rights in itself, but rather highlighted a different way to effectuate radical political change in regard to the human-nonhuman-animal-relationship. In the end, I believe a combination of these two—and likely even more—philosophical perspectives will underlie the political turn's success.

Here I have emphasised virtue ethics specifically, as I believe focusing on the moral agent's character development, their attitudes towards acting right and their sustained commitment to the cultivation of moral virtue throughout one's life, offers a refreshing and frankly necessary viewpoint for both our individual and collective political responsibilities towards nonhuman-animals. Through considering a preliminary selection of moral virtues, as well as moral character and virtuous behaviour more generally, I hope to have shown that the language of virtues opens up new and creative ways of thinking about how we can effectuate political change in a fruitful way.

In regard to the identified political turn itself, I shaped my thesis around the assumption that its pragmatic approach and its focus on justice, are the most important characteristics that encapsulate the distinctiveness of this body of work. As such, one must keep in mind that my defence of the virtue ethical perspective to the political turn's success, only extends to these two commitments. I concede that for a complete defence, future research ought to complement

²⁰⁸ Stallwood, "Are We Smart Enough to Know When to Take the Political Turn for Animals?," 289.

my efforts by including more elements that have also been proposed to be part of the political turn.

In regard to the pragmatic requirement I showed that virtue ethics in particular—as opposed to consequentialist and deontological perspectives—is able to provide action guidance, rather than merely establishing what action type is wrong. The pragmatic requirement also forces us to recognise the need for approaches that are similarly able to reflect the nuances and complexity we face in our various relationships with nonhuman animals. Through combining diverse and rich ‘virtue language’ with the intellectual virtue of practical wisdom I argued that such insights on moral behaviour of the individual agent are indispensable within a society with a plurality of values. In line with this, through discussing other-regarding virtues such as compassion, empathy, and even respect for nature I rebutted the counterargument that virtue ethics’ human-centredness is therewith anthropocentric and consequently cannot guide action that is supposed to take animals’ interests into account.

Thus I have indeed assumed a virtue ethical perspective that situates the human being at the centre of our normative reflections, precisely because of the need for more pragmatic efforts within the political turn. Namely in this thesis, I assume that thinking about changing our human-nonhuman-animal-relationships at the political level may prove to be easier by assuming such a human-centred view point. However to be clear, I have not made the claim that such human centred reflection on our current political systems is best per se. Perhaps, using current political concepts—and theoretical approaches—that have arisen from staging humans at the centre, should be tweaked or extended to truly offer a fair consideration of interspecies relations. Or perhaps we might even have to come up with new concepts for political reflection of animal advocacy altogether. Although this line of reasoning is definitely worth pursuing, I have situated my thesis outside of this debate precisely because of the turn’s pragmatic requirement, where I have showed that virtue ethics respects such efforts.

In order to assert that the virtue ethical perspective could indeed meet the political turn’s requirement for emphasising that the treatment of nonhuman animals is a matter of justice, I firstly deflated the concern that virtue ethical language is outside the scope of justice considerations by appealing to Aristotle’s virtue of justice, and various other-regarding virtues that do in fact take the interests of other living beings into account. I complemented this further by arguing that through emphasising virtue ethical inclinations of one’s moral character specifically, we support the endeavour that the animal rights movement—which encapsulates both the pragmatic and justice requirements from the political turn—should first be embraced

as a social justice movement. I have not argued that the efforts of social movements to ensure that specific human rights are respected, extends directly to asserting legal animal rights. Rather, I have argued that the shared experience under oppressive institutions—as identified through their intersectional elements—show that animal injustices are of similar magnitude, which underscores the need for radical political change. Only after this idea is widely recognised, can we expect that taking the political turn will be successful.

In line with this, I tried to show how insights from virtue ethics are particularly well suited to highlight intersectionality between these movements, as the virtuous agent will be inclined to act on the moral virtues which they have cultivated into their own character. Moreover, the habituation that is required for cultivating these virtues directly supports the need for long term commitment of the agent. These elements combined, make virtue ethics useful for both supporting the animal rights movement as a fully-fledged social justice movement, and to propagate such long term commitment to enabling the necessary societal change in oneself and others. At the same time, whilst emphasising the intersectionality of social movements with animal advocacy, we ought to keep concerns for upholding racial hierarchies and racial biases in mind. Additionally, I argued that embracing animal advocacy as a social justice issue will not be cause for displacement or trivialisation of other social movements, but rather support the success of other movements as well. As such, we assert that the correct treatment of nonhuman animals is a matter of justice, without having to fall back on a language of moral rights.

I hope to have shown that it would be unwise to solely focus on pursuing the political turn through moral rights approaches as currently seems to be the case. Other avenues should be considered if we truly wish for the political turn to thrive. I do not rule out that other approaches might be similarly or even more successful to the political turn's success, than the virtue ethical approach I have discussed in this thesis. Just like I questioned the assumption that the sole focus on moral rights is justified, the sole focus on virtue ethical alternatives would be similarly ill-considered. I believe in the end the political turn's success will depend on a multitude of approaches and their intertwined efforts that complement each other. However, having said that, I do believe that virtue ethics deserves more attention within the political turn, and that it would be better off when this approach would be pursued further by others.

Thus to conclude, by granting the language of virtues centre stage, I argued that emphasis on the sustained commitment of the virtuous agent to act in accordance with virtue, reflects a pragmatic approach, and underpins why animal advocacy should be embraced as a social justice issue: making it particularly promising for the success of the political turn.

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