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Nonhuman Animals in Adam Smith's Moral Theory

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Abstract

By giving sympathy a central role, Adam Smith's Theory of Moral Sentiments (1759) can be regarded as one of the 'enlightened' moral theories of the Enlightenment, insofar as it widened the scope of moral consideration beyond the traditionally restricted boundary of human beings. This, although the author himself does not seem to have been aware of this fact. In this paper, I want to focus on two aspects which I think lead to this conclusion. First, by making sentience the requisite to be taken into moral consideration, nonhuman animals in Smith's moral theory can count as moral patients towards whom we should exercise the virtue of beneficence (if not justice). Secondly, Smith's idea of morality as working in concentric circles –generating more stringent duties towards those closer to us– could explain and perhaps also justify our caring for some nonhuman animals, especially pets.

Introduction

In a conference earlier this year, Bruce Wagman, a leading American animal protection lawyer, explained some of the cases he had defended during his career and showed some pictures –hoarded dogs, drug-addicted dolphins and cows suffering from mastitis, among others– shocking enough to stir the conscience or at least make frown some of those in the audience. Then came the time for questions, among which was the simple, straightforward one: “Why do you do what you do?” This was more or less what Wagman answered: “I put myself in the place of that pig which will spend his whole life trapped in a cage in a factory farm, or in the place of the calf that will never see its mother, and I feel that I wouldn’t want to be that pig or that veal. Consequently, I try to act to change that”.

Although he was probably unaware of the fact, Wagman’s reply could have been that of a firmly convinced reader of Adam Smith’s *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (hereafter, TMS). Published for the first time in 1759 and celebrating 250 years now, this book presented Smith’s moral theory and was his most popular work during his lifetime; this, until his famous *Wealth of Nations* (hereafter, WN) eclipsed the former and made him pass to history more as an economist than as a philosopher. That we care for the happiness of others and that we put ourselves imaginatively in their place and situation to try to feel what they feel as accurately as possible were for Smith –as for Wagman– the two basic premises upon which his moral theory was founded. The result was the natural process of sympathy, understood by Smith not merely as a “contagion or infection” of feelings (as his friend and former teacher, Francis Hutcheson, called it) (Hutcheson, 2007, p. 33), but as the mutual concord of sentiments between agent and spectator, resulting from an imaginative projection in both directions and producing pleasure in both.

I want to argue in this paper that, by giving sympathy a central role, Smith's Theory of Moral Sentiments can be regarded as one of the 'enlightened' moral theories of the Enlightenment, insofar as it widened the scope of moral consideration beyond the traditionally restricted boundary of human beings (although the author himself doesn't seem to have been aware of this fact). I will focus on two aspects of Smith's thought which I think lead to this conclusion. Firstly, Smithian sympathy enables us to "change persons and characters" (Smith, 1982b, p. 317) with all those capable of feeling pain and pleasure; sentience is all that is required for a creature to be taken into moral consideration. Although it is clear that Smith's theory as it is formulated restricts moral agency to human beings (as the only ones capable of doing good or harm by design), it allows however the possibility for all nonhuman animals to be considered as moral patients, insofar as we can imagine ourselves in their situation and approve or disapprove of the conduct of rational moral agents towards them. If the virtue governing our dealings with them and with those who affect them should be that of justice or beneficence is a question to be raised here, as well as the tension between this account and that given in the WN, where nonhuman animals are treated as "unmanufactured commodities" (Smith, 1994, p. 214) and "necessary articles." (Smith, 1994, p. 258) Secondly, I would like to point to Smith's understanding of morality as working in concentric circles –that is, giving more preference and generating more stringent duties towards those situated closer to us (this is the idea of the 'expanding circle', coming from the Stoics and also present in Hutcheson). The issue here is how this would explain and perhaps also justify our caring for some nonhuman animals, especially pets.

I. Nonhuman Animals as Moral Patients

Smithian Sympathy

Before proceeding, I will offer a very brief account of what I consider to be the main points of Smith's moral theory. Its starting point, as was said above, is what he

considers to be two indisputable principles of human nature: first, our concern for the happiness of others, which originates the most basic form of sympathy, defined as “our fellow-feeling with any passion whatsoever” (Smith, 1982b, p. 10); and second, our capacity to change places “in fancy” (Smith, 1982b, p. 10) with others, imaginatively putting ourselves in their situation. As we are interested in the other’s feelings, but cannot have first-hand access to them, it is through imagination that we “become in some measure the same person with him, and thence form some idea of his sensations, and even feel something which, though weaker in degree, is not altogether unlike them.” (Smith, 1982b, p. 9) When there is a concord between the feelings of agent and spectator, both feel the pleasure of mutual sympathy, and “nothing pleases us more than to observe in other men a fellow-feeling with the emotions of our own breast.” (Smith, 1982b, p. 13) One of the distinctive traits of Smithian sympathy is that we can feel the pleasure of it even if the original sentiments that cause it are painful. That is why...

...we run not only to congratulate the successful, but to condole with the afflicted; and the pleasure which we find in the conversation of one whom in all the passions of his heart we can entirely sympathize with, seems to do more than compensate the painfulness of that sorrow with which the view of his situation affects us (Smith, 1982b, p. 16).

The necessary and sufficient condition to be an object of sympathy, then, is to have passions; in other words, to be capable of experiencing pain and pleasure. So far, nonhuman animals, especially mammals, perfectly fit into this category.

I suggest that Smith understands sympathy as having different gradations, starting from this most basic one, which we share with every other sentient creature. Actually, he never uses the term ‘sentient’, but he does refer to “beings capable of feeling pleasure and pain” (Smith, 1982b, p. 94). With time and experience, however, he says that we realise that a double adjustment is required for the mutual concord of sentiments to be more perfect: the spectator has to augment as much as he can the intensity of his own sentiments, to match those of the individual

principally concerned; in turn, the latter has to check his own original passions to the point where the spectator will approve of them. At this stage, not all nonhuman animals fit the picture so clearly any more. Dog owners of course, will argue that their pets adjust their feelings to them all the time: they are grumpy when we are grumpy, and playful when we are playful. But then dogs would seem to be an exception within the animal kingdom, together with a couple of other species, mainly mammals, which either have a long shared history with humans (i.e., some domestic animals) or which share with humans a close evolutionary development (i.e., all the great apes). However, that the shark can adjust its feelings to the diver when finding him in the middle of the ocean, or that nightingales and swallows get sad when they see sad people (excepting those in Oscar Wilde's stories), would seem a far-fetched claim.

There is still one more step to go. While so far this could be understood as a characterization of pre-moral or psychological sympathy, there is still a third element needed for it to become a proper moral sentiment. That is the impartial spectator, an imagined third party –based on actual, indifferent spectators not involved in the actions being judged– in whose place we learn to set ourselves before making our moral judgments. Morality for Smith requires impartiality, derived from acknowledging our basic equality as human beings. And, to judge impartially, leaving aside our considerations of self-interest, it is necessary to set this imaginary judge between us and the agent. Again, with time and experience, this figure is supposed to become the voice of our conscience and to direct our moral judgments, even if in practice it is enough for most people, most of the time, just to follow the general rules of conduct (which spring from the same source: the innumerable judgments of hundreds of impartial spectators within our society).

More precisely, then, Smithian moral sympathy could be defined as the mutual concord between agent and spectator in the 'proper' sentiments (namely, those that an impartial spectator would approve of), which results from an imaginative

projection in both directions and produces pleasure in both parties. At this level, even if we could concede that some animals –such as dogs– can accommodate their passions to concur with ours, it would be implausible to claim that their passions are moderated by impartiality. If this is the case, nonhuman animals and, in general, all beings that are not rational enough to mediate their moral judgments through the figure of the impartial spectator, would thus seem to be ruled out of the moral territory. Or are they?

Moral Agents, Moral Patients

Although Smith himself never drew the distinction between moral agents and moral patients, my claim is that this distinction is implicit in his theory and that it is through it that we can make sense of it as including nonhuman animals as proper objects of moral consideration. This happens in the following way.

After analysing the judgments of propriety (where we evaluate the suitability of the agent's affection to the cause or object that excites it), in the second part of the TMS Smith explains our judgements of merit and demerit. In these, what we judge is “the beneficial or hurtful effects that an affection aims at or tends to produce.” (Smith, 1982b, p. 67) While the judgment of propriety arises from a direct sympathy with the feelings of the agent, that of merit is built upon two distinct emotions: “a direct sympathy with the sentiments of the agent, and an indirect sympathy with the gratitude of those who receive the benefit of his actions.” (Smith, 1982b, p. 74) In the same manner, while the judgment of impropriety arises from a direct want of sympathy with the feelings of the agent, that of demerit is also built upon two distinct emotions: “a direct antipathy to the sentiments of the agent and an indirect sympathy with the resentment of the sufferer.” (Smith, 1982b, p. 75) For example, if we see that someone misses his bus in order to help an old lady cross the street, we will approve of his action, feeling indirect sympathy with the gratitude of the old lady towards her benefactor and direct sympathy with the latter's generosity.

Conversely, if we see that someone approaches the old lady to steal her purse, we will feel indirect sympathy with the resentment of the victim, and direct antipathy towards the mischievousness of the offender.

Now, why is the sympathy with the gratitude or resentment of the beneficiary/victim 'indirect'? Smith explains that it is because it is independent of what she herself feels; namely, it is enough for us to put ourselves in her situation and judge from her situation if the conduct of her benefactor/aggressor deserves praise/blame, even if there is no actual correspondence of sentiments with her. Taking the above example, if the old lady is a misanthrope and seems more angry than thankful to her benefactor, we –taking the stance of the impartial spectator– will feel gratitude towards him nonetheless and judge the agent's conduct as meritorious. Conversely, if the old lady gets mugged but is so magnanimous that she feels pity more than anger towards her offender, we –taking the stance of the impartial spectator– will nevertheless feel resentment towards him and judge him to be blameworthy and deserving punishment. Thus, Smith says that...

...our sense of merit is sometimes founded upon one of those illusive sympathies, by which, when we bring home to ourselves the case of another, we are often affected in a manner in which the person principally concerned is incapable of being affected (Smith, 1982b, p. 78).

Having said this, it is relatively clear that nonhuman animals could have a place in this scheme, as beneficiaries or sufferers; that is, as moral patients. This, even though Smith himself did not explicitly acknowledge this possibility. If I see a caged lion recently rescued from a circus and waiting to be sent back to the savannah by the Animal Liberation Society, I can imagine myself in its place and feel gratitude towards its helpers, who are making big efforts to resettle it in its own environment. Most surely, however, the lion won't be as grateful as we are: lacking the perspective of the near future, it will probably roar and roar until freed and presumably it will not give special thanks to its liberators. On the contrary, if I see a farmer brutally beating his ox, I can imagine myself in the place of the latter and feel resentment

towards the aggressor (Smith, 1982b, p. 94), regardless of the ox's own reaction to it (maybe it is so used to this maltreatment, that it no longer poses any opposition to the stick). The important point to note is that, as long as they are capable of feeling pleasure and pain, they can be taken into moral consideration. (A question that could be raised at this point is whether, as objects of moral consideration, nonhuman animals have a right to third-party self-defence; and, if they do, what implications this would have for our everyday morality.) (Cf. Hadley, 2009)

While the place of nonhuman animals as moral patients in the TMS is implicit, but quite clear, Smith's stance towards nonhuman animals as moral agents is explicit, but not as clear in its implications.

When analysing the proper objects of gratitude and resentment, Smith states from the first lines that these two passions are present in all animals:

The causes of pain and pleasure, whatever they are, or however they operate, seem to be the objects, which, in all animals, immediately excite those two passions of gratitude and resentment (Smith, 1982b, p. 94).

These causes can be inanimate or animate. Thus, we can feel 'animal' (instinctive) resentment for a rock that hurt us and we can feel 'animal' (instinctive) gratitude for the plank which saved us from the shipwreck. Moreover, if the mischief or the good done are very great, it is not altogether inconceivable that we will, respectively, seek revenge against that object or try to preserve it "with care and affection." (Smith, 1982b, p. 94) These feelings are what P.F Strawson calls 'reactive attitudes', except that –contra Smith– he limits them to human beings, defining them as "essentially natural human reactions to the good or ill will or indifference towards us, as displayed in their attitudes and actions" (Strawson, 1974, p. 7) Excepting great apes, a further question along these lines would be whether nonhuman animals, according to our author, are also capable of feeling the other two kinds of reactive attitudes classified by Strawson: sympathetic or vicarious –like indignation– and

self-reactive –like guilt.

We soon realise, however, that things like rocks and planks are very improper objects of these moral feelings, as “their gratification consists in retaliating those sensations upon what gave occasion to them; which is to no purpose to attempt upon what has no sensibility.” (Smith, 1982b, p. 94)

Apart from being the cause of pleasure and pain, then, Smith adds a second necessary condition to become the proper object of gratitude or resentment; namely, that it must be capable of feeling pain and pleasure. This is why animals “are less improper objects of these passions than inanimate objects.” (Smith, 1982b, p. 95) If we put to death the Rottweiler who killed a child, it is not merely out of a consideration of utility (to preserve the security of the living), but also because in some measure we want to take revenge for what it did. (For more on human’s reactive attitudes towards animals, cf. Midgley, 1983, Singer and Cavalieri, 1994) On the contrary, animals that have been serviceable deserve all our gratitude. Smith’s own example here is worth quoting:

We are shocked at the brutality of that officer, mentioned in the Turkish Spy, who stabbed the horse that had carried him across an arm of the sea, lest that animal should afterwards distinguish some other person by a similar adventure (Smith, 1982b, p. 95).

But this is still not enough to completely gratify proper gratitude and resentment. While we can make animals feel pleasure and pain in return for the good or bad that they inflicted, we can never make them conscious that they are getting this reward or that punishment on account of their past conduct. To be the proper object of gratitude and resentment, a third condition is yet to be met; namely, that he must have produced that pleasure or pain intentionally, by design –“a design that is approved of in the one case, and disapproved of in the other.” (Smith, 1982b, p. 95) It would seem, then, that while we can feel ‘animal’ resentment or gratitude towards inanimate objects and non-rational creatures (among them, nonhuman animals), it

is only towards other rational purposeful creatures that we can completely satisfy these feelings, “as it gives a pleasure or pain that is both exquisite and peculiar” and as “it is likewise an additional exciting cause of those passions.” (Smith, 1982b, p. 96)

Proper moral agents for Smith would then be those who are capable of feeling and producing pain and pleasure intentionally (thus becoming the proper objects of gratitude or resentment), while nonhuman animals would seem to fall under an intermediate category, as they are capable of feeling and producing pain and pleasure, albeit not intentionally (thus becoming the objects of basic animal gratitude or resentment only). When we say that we praise or blame them, then, we would be using these terms metaphorically. (Again, in Strawson’s terminology, we could say that, regarding nonhuman animals, we are invited to “suspend our reactive attitudes towards the agent”, insofar as it is underdeveloped, taking instead an objective stance towards it (Strawson, 1974, p. 8).)

A matter of justice or beneficence?

So far, I have tried to show how nonhuman animals have a space in Smith’s moral theory, as moral patients and only imperfectly as agents. What I want to show next are the implications of this for the practice of the virtues of justice and beneficence towards them.

Justice and beneficence are the two Smithian virtues that govern our relationships with others. Smith says that we commit an injustice whenever we intentionally do a positive harm to another and that we behave justly by abstaining from doing harm. Justice is the minimal, essential virtue for the maintenance of society and it is the only one that is enforceable. Beneficence, by contrast, is not the foundation of the social edifice, but a nice embellishment: it consists in intentionally doing good to another and it can never be enforced. (Smith, 1982b, p. 86) If we commit an

injustice, we become the proper objects of resentment and deserve to be punished (judgment of demerit); if we lack beneficence, we can be disapproved of and even hated, but nobody can force us to behave otherwise. Conversely, by being just we are approved of, while by being beneficent we become the proper objects of gratitude and deserve reward (judgment of merit). But two further clarifications remain to be made at this point: who are the ‘others’? And, what is considered as ‘harm’ and ‘good’?

A possible, straightforward answer to these questions would be that to harm is to produce pain; to do good is to produce pleasure; and that the ‘others’ are all those capable of feeling pain and pleasure, i.e, ‘moral patients’. Taking the examples above, the farmer cruelly beating the ox would then be judged as behaving unjustly, and the members of the Animal Liberation Society would be praised for their beneficence towards the ex circus lion. However, Smith’s theory at this point gives a twist that makes things more complicated.

First, concerning justice, Smith understands ‘the others’ to be our “neighbours”, “the rest of mankind”, the multitude among whom the individual is “in no respect better than any other in it.” (Smith, 1982b, pp. 79-80) In sum, he thinks of justice as a virtue which we display only towards other rational human beings and which presupposes the recognition of the equal moral worth of every one. What counts as harm, moreover, is not merely pain, but something more precise, namely, any violation against what Smith –following the natural law theorists– counts as ‘perfect rights’ (Smith, 1982a, p. 9). These include the right to our life and person (which includes our reputation); the right to property and possessions; and personal rights, due to us from the promises of others (for example, those arising from contracts). (Smith, 1982b, p. 84)

Following this understanding of justice and harm, then, we would have to leave nonhuman animals out of the picture (and –if Smith had followed the consequences

of his theory all the way through— also those human beings who cannot be considered as moral agents). Although I will not pursue the implications of this in this paper, I suggest that this account creates a tension with his initial utility-based account of the moral sentiments and, in particular, resentment: here, he states that we can only be just or unjust towards those who can also be just or unjust towards us. That he did not consider killing nonhuman animals as something morally wrong is clear when he says in the TMS that, while shooting a man is the most blameable action, shooting a bird is the most innocent one. (Hume's conception of justice also rules out nonhuman animals for similar considerations (Cf. Hume, 1975 pp. 190-191).)

To make sense of Smith's point, it might be useful to remember that he was no exception among the vast majority of thinkers of his time regarding the place of man on Earth. The religious (or deistic) belief on the superiority of man and his dominion over nature remained unquestioned for him. What is more, he saw the human will to pursue wealth and riches —as a means of improvement and advance for the overall system:

It is this which first prompted them to cultivate the ground, to build houses, to found cities and commonwealths, and to invent and improve all the sciences and arts, which ennoble and embellish human life; which have entirely changed the whole face of the globe, have turned the rude forests of nature into agreeable and fertile plains, and made the trackless and barren ocean a new fund of subsistence, and the great high road of communication to the different nations of the earth. The earth by these labours of mankind has been obliged to redouble her natural fertility, and to maintain a greater multitude of inhabitants (Smith, 1982b, p. 184).

But it is in the WN where his treatment of nonhuman animals is more at odds with his sympathy-based theory, and where he appears more as a typical eighteenth-century scholar than as an animal welfare theorist *avant la lettre*. There, he sharply distinguishes them from human beings, both regarding their value and their abilities and natural tendencies.

Regarding their value, instead of being treated as sensible creatures towards which we can exercise our sympathy, they are “rude produce of which the price rises in the progress of improvement” (Smith, 1994, p. 253) of the society. According to the ability of man to multiply their numbers and regulate their supply, they are divided into two classes. To the first sort belong wild animals, “rare and singular birds and fishes, many different sorts of game, almost all wild-fowl, all birds of passage in particular” and many other things, considered as “rarities and curiosities of high value as human industry could not multiply at pleasure” (Smith, 1994, p. 251). Game animals, particularly venison, are “a superfluity” (Smith, 1994, p. 258) considered fashionable at the time and the price of which was continually rising. To the second sort belong cattle, poultry, hogs and other domestic animals, “which human industry can multiply in proportion to demand” (Smith, 1994, p. 253). They are referred to as “unmanufactured commodities” (Smith, 1994, p. 214), “instruments of husbandry” (Smith, 1994, p. 166) and “necessary articles” (Smith, 1994, p. 258); in sum, useful pieces of instrumental value. In fact, domestic animals, especially cattle, are considered by Smith as productive labourers, on a par with labouring servants and useful particularly for poor families, who can keep them at relatively low cost. (This idea that men are to rule over the other animals, and that animals –as the rest of nature– are there for the multiplication of mankind is also present in Smith’s former teacher, Francis Hutcheson. The latter, however, is more adamant on emphasizing the importance of treating them humanely: “The interest of the whole animal system would require that those endued with reason and reflection, and consequently capable of higher and more lasting happiness or misery, should be preserved and multiplied, even though it occasioned a diminution of the numbers of inferior animals. These considerations abundantly evidence that right of mankind to take the most copious use of inferior creatures, even those endued with life. And yet all useless cruelty towards the brute animals is highly blameable” (Hutcheson, 2007 p. 135).)

Does Smith in the WN erase with his elbow what in the TMS he wrote with his

hand? Maybe partly, but not completely. It is when he refers to the abilities and natural tendencies of nonhuman animals where we can find evidence that, although excluded from the realm of justice, he leaves a place for them in the realm of beneficence.

When praising the division of labour, “the greatest improvement in the productive powers of labour” (Smith, 1994, p. 3), Smith says that this results from a tendency which is exclusive of human beings, namely, “the propensity to truck, barter, and exchange one thing for another.” (Smith, 1994, p. 14) As humans are the least self-sufficient of all animals, we are in constant need of help; and as we cannot always obtain it from beneficence (because it would take too much time, as we need the services of too many different people), we appeal to the self-interest of the other, engaging in contracts and mutually beneficial transactions. By contrast, other animals, particularly domestic ones like dogs, do not gain our favour by appealing to our self-love, but to our good will:

A puppy fawns upon its dam, and a spaniel endeavours by a thousand attractions to engage the attention of its master who is at dinner, when it wants to be fed by him (Smith, 1994, p. 15).

What matters here is that Smith acknowledges that we can be persuaded by our pets to help them meet their needs. The ‘others’ in the case of beneficence, then, would seem to be not only our equals –as in the case of justice– but also, at least, those sentient creatures with whom we have a certain relationship. And the ‘good’ would consist in promoting their happiness or, at least, preventing their misery. As we saw, although killing is not considered by Smith as a wrong that we can do to other species –insofar as they are part of Nature, and Nature, in turn, is at the service of “the industry of mankind” (Smith, 1982b, p. 83)–, making them suffer or inflicting them unnecessary pain would thus be a different matter. Furthermore, in its purest and most extreme form the virtue of beneficence becomes ‘universal benevolence’, through which:

...we cannot form the idea of any innocent and sensible being, whose happiness we should not desire, or to whose misery, when distinctly brought home to the imagination, we should not have some degree of aversion (Smith, 1982b, p. 235).

How to understand ‘happiness’ in this context? More than once along his book, Smith refers to the self-preservation and propagation of the species as “the great ends which Nature seems to have proposed in the formation of all animals.” (Smith, 1982b, p. 77) This, however, serves more as a heuristic ideal than as an attainable goal, as the business of God, but not of man. In practice, our business is much more delimited, and our moral duties towards the others are regulated according to the position in which we stand in relation to them. To this point I finally turn.

II. Nonhuman Animals in the Concentric Circles of Sympathy

In his analysis of the virtue of beneficence, Smith introduces the idea that, although morality presupposes impartiality, this does not mean that we should treat everyone equally, but that we should treat similar cases with similar criteria; and what the case is depends on the relationship involved. (For example, impartiality in this sense does not mean that a mother ought to treat her child with the same care and concern as any other child; but that she ought to treat him as all mothers are expected to treat their own children.)

The closer the relationship, Smith thinks, the greater the duty. Close relatives, close friends, neighbours and trade partners form what could be called the first ‘circle’ of sympathy, followed by those in an extraordinary situation (mainly, the rich and the poor, towards whom we owe –respectively– gratitude and pity), fellow citizens, the inhabitants of other societies and, finally, the universe of “all rational and sensible beings.” (Smith, 1982b p. 237) (I borrow the term ‘circles of sympathy’ from Charles Griswold, one of Smith’s most prominent commentators (Griswold, 1999, p. 214).)

Again, although Smith himself remains silent on this subject, I suggest that nonhuman animals could be part of at least two of these concentric circles: the closest and the farthest. How? Regarding the latter, I have already pointed to Smith's ideal of universal benevolence and how nonhuman animals fit as its objects. Regarding the former, pets could be included as the proper objects of affection or 'habitual sympathy' (Smith, 1982b, p. 220), which takes place when we spend a lot of time in the company of another and we learn to mutually accommodate, making our sympathy "more lively, more distinct, and more determinate." (Smith, 1982b, pp. 219-220) Anyone that has lived with a dog or a cat knows how our sympathy towards them refines with time and how their lack of human speech –and our lack of dog/cat language– does not preclude mutual understanding. In this sense, it could be said that Smith's theory is a precursor of recent theories in the line of Mary Midgley's "mixed community" of humans and domestic animals (Midgley, 1983), or Baird Callicott's "biosocial moral theory" (Callicott). Although the latter claim their roots to be in the Humean conception of sympathy more than in Smith's TMS, they share the view that, insofar as we develop with pets and some other domestic animals a certain degree of intimacy, this originates in turn mutual feelings of love and care that should be taken into account in our everyday morality.

Conclusion

In conclusion, in this paper I have attempted to show how, 250 years ago, Adam Smith's moral theory widened the boundaries of moral consideration by opening a place for sentient creatures. As moral patients, nonhuman animals can be the objects of beneficence (if not justice, which Smith understands –arbitrarily, it could be argued– as happening only between moral agents). While, ideally, moral agents should aim at tending to promote the happiness of every sensible and rational creature, in practice our duties of beneficence are limited to our closer 'circles' of sympathy. In this sense, pets have a clear chance of being taken into account, insofar as we share with them enough time and experiences as to build a mutual

affection.

It cannot be ignored, however, that Smith's theory is much more avant garde than what the author himself acknowledged: no exception among his peers, he thought of nonhuman animals mostly as commodities with instrumental value and never questioned their use for farming/human consumption. It could be said on his behalf that Smith didn't pursue the full implications of his theory because the time was not yet ripe. Although unknowingly– he left the seeds, it was too soon for him to harvest...

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