

On the last page of the article Gaylin uses language to indicate his view of the superiority of the human to the nonhuman: "If the love and caring are supplied only minimally, he [a human being] may survive as a biological entity without the qualities of humanness that elevate him above the common animal host. If at any key point an individual is withdrawn from contact with his kind, he may recreate social relationships in his imagination that sustain him for a time, but he suffers the risk of being reduced to an *animal indistinguishable from lower forms*"(p. 72, italics mine). But there is no argument at all in the paper to the effect that we alone are moral animals, and no argument for the superiority of human to nonhuman animals. The focus of the article is chiefly a discussion of the emotion of guilt. What distinguishes the human from the nonhuman, however, is instead the focus of the abstract, as is Gaylin's claim that human beings are defined as the only moral animal. That claim is relevant to the topic of this paper.

<sup>8</sup> Gaylin, "Feeling," *op. cit.*, p. 72.

<sup>9</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*(New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1959): 414, p. 31.

<sup>10</sup> Levertov, *op. cit.*

<sup>11</sup> R. G. Frey, "The Significance of Agency and Marginal Cases," *Philosophica* 39 (1987), p. 40.

<sup>12</sup> I may also be less satisfied when I reach the vista—if my expectations are too high—precisely because of my forward-looking approach. But that is the third problem with Frey's argument, that judgmentalness (concomitant with high expectations) diminishes the felt satisfactions even of experiences that would have been perfectly satisfactory otherwise.

<sup>13</sup> *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones* (Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1957), ed. by Paul Reps, p. 18.

<sup>14</sup> Leo Tolstoy, *The Death of Ivan Ilych* (New York: New American Library, 1960), pp. 147-148 and 152.

<sup>15</sup> Although Ivan Ilych is a fictional character created by Tolstoy, Tolstoy's characterization of one progression of attitudes and insights through the dying experience has been confirmed as both realistic and not uncommon by those who work with the dying, according to conversations with Marion Wilson Gruzalski, who has founded two hospices, developed a third, and consulted for many more.

<sup>16</sup> Derrick Jensen, *Listening to the Land: Conversations about Nature, Culture, and Eros* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1995), p. 6. Dave Forman is the founder of the activist group Earth First! and, more recently, the Wilderness Project.

<sup>17</sup> From "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell," in Bly, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

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## Response: Autonomy, Animals, and Conceptions of The Good

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R. G. Frey

Bowling Green State University

In a number of recent articles on animal issues,<sup>1</sup> I have set out one view of the comparative value of human and animal life. It is a view consonant both with my earlier writings on animals<sup>2</sup> and with the emphasis upon quality of life accounts of the value of life that are so much a part of contemporary writing in medical ethics and in applied ethics generally. Numerous details of this quality of life view remain to be filled in, of course, but its general outline, I think, is clear enough. Even in general outline, however, some philosophers and others have found the view wanting, if not in its entirety, then certainly in some of its more prominent features. One feature that has proved especially controversial is that the value of some human lives can turn out to be of a quality so low as to be exceeded in value by the lives of some perfectly healthy animals, which in turn can have implications for, say, which creatures are to be used in medical experimentation. Another such feature, it would appear, has been my remarks on the role of autonomy in the value of human, as opposed to, animal lives.<sup>3</sup> Bart Gruzalski's paper "Autonomy and The Myth of Human Superiority" is very much in this latter vein. I should like here briefly to respond to some of Gruzalski's comments, before trying to bring more sharply into focus certain features of the comparative view of the value of human and animal life that I hold. (In what follows, I leave aside Gruzalski's remarks on other philosophers.)

In a way, it is odd that Gruzalski puts me in the camp of those who espouse human "superiority." Most



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often, over the comparative value of human and animal life, I am found by medical experimenters and others in the scientific community to be far too pro animal. Concerning the value of life, far from asserting any human superiority *tout court*, I have laid out in a large number of papers<sup>4</sup> all kinds of situations in which the value of an animal's life can exceed that of a human life. To be sure, the human life in question may be an unfortunate or tragic one, but that only makes the point, which I stress repeatedly, that not all human lives have the same value as normal adult human life. So any thought that I affirm a blanket superiority of the value of human over animal life is mistaken; indeed, it is precisely because I know of nothing that to my mind supports any such blanket claim that many feel I have, at least in the area of experimentation, gone too far in the animal direction. Certainly, my position is radically different from that, say, of Carl Cohen, who, as best I can tell, asserts rather confidently such a human superiority.<sup>5</sup>

When I began developing my views on the comparative value of human and animal lives, I was aware that my choosing to use the word "autonomy" to characterize the general phenomenon of choosing and living out some conception of the good, of choosing a kind of life for oneself and molding and shaping one's day to day living in order to live out that life, could prove confusing. It could encourage someone to think that autonomy played a role in my conception of the value of a life that it played, e.g., in Kant or other deontological theorists. I thought my discussion of the matter, especially my avowal that autonomy was only an instrumental good, protected me from this confusion.

Apparently, however, this is not the case. Thus, in what Gruzalski refers to as the "consensus view" of the value of a life, which he maintains I share, it is claimed that "human life, because of autonomy, is more valuable than nonhuman life." Later, he characterizes the consensus view as the claim that "our lives are more valuable than the lives of nonhuman animals because of a *richness* in our lives that derives from autonomy and autonomy-based abilities..." (italics in original). Still later, he speaks of the consensus view as claiming that our lives are "more valuable than the lives of nonhuman animals because we are autonomous..." I do not believe these things, at least if the word "because" in each case means what it usually means. For what all of these claims do is to ascribe to autonomy an importance and value that it does not have in my view.

Rather, I hold the view that autonomy can be, and in the case of normal adult humans usually is, the source of additional value in a life, where that value is determined by all the experiences, and by all the kinds of experiences, that go to make up the life in question. I shall return to this matter below.

So far as I am concerned, Gruzalski makes three points. First, have goals, ends, desires, and a conception of the good life and, because these can all be frustrated, disappointment and/or suffering can occur. Second, have a conception of the good life and seek to mold and shape one's life according to it and, because one can be overly preoccupied with planning one's life, one can fail to live for the moment or to live spontaneously and, so, fail to obtain those goods that such living makes possible. Third, what Gruzalski calls "judgmentalness"—the judgment that "things are not good enough the way they are"—can undermine the satisfaction that our present feelings, experiences, and relationships would otherwise confer upon us.

In a way, these strike me as rather odd criticisms, since they all amount to claims about what might happen, in the absence of any explanation, particularly any causal explanation, of why they will happen. Even if all these things are possible, however, left in the very general terms in which they are couched, it is not easy to see what of any great significance ensues.

It is perfectly true that, if we rid ourselves of all goals, ends, desires, and conceptions of the good life, then we will not be disappointed through failing to achieve or satisfy some of these. What exactly do we make of this fact? Do we tell our children, "Do not seek anything," "Strive for nothing," "Have no ambition to make something of yourself"? Plainly, we do not: striving, even *with* the added prospect of failure that it opens up for us, is an important part, not only of what we make of our lives, but also of their value; and though disappointment often attends the failure fully to achieve what we strive for, we counsel our children to stretch themselves to the full. As it were, the journey, as much as the arrival, enriches a life. That is why people often say, even when they *have* failed, that the attempt was nevertheless worth it.

Part of what may have gone wrong here is that Gruzalski may have taken my notion of the richness of a life as a way to refer, as it were, to the quantity of experiences crammed into a life without regard to the various kinds of experiences they are. One of the reasons we want our children to stretch themselves to the full is

that we know that there are all kinds or sorts of experiences that life has to offer, and sampling them is part of what we refer to when we say of someone that s/he led a "rich, full" life. Such a statement does not refer to a single dimension of experience, say, the pleasure to be had from consuming desserts endlessly; it refers to the multiple dimensions of the lives we associate with normal adult humans. At times, Gruzalski seems to write as if "felt satisfaction" meant pleasure; but I am not a hedonist. I have all kinds of desires the fulfillment of which involve me in all kinds of experiences; I may feel pleasure as the result of desire-satisfaction, but there is no necessity in this and certainly no identity between desire-satisfaction and pleasure. Of course, the multi-dimensionality of normal adult human lives means that the chances for desire-frustration are greater perhaps than if we had only a single dimension to our lives, but even desire-frustration does not lead most of us to look back and claim that our lives would have been more valuable still if we had had only one kind of desire and if that kind of desire was one we could easily satisfy. The richness of our lives is not some mechanical adding together of our pleasurable experiences, so that, if we could only stuff ourselves with the desserts that we love, we should achieve the richest, the supreme life of all. All of us want lives for ourselves that contain more than desserts; we want a full array of experiences over a broad range of the sorts of activities that go to make up the lives of normal adult humans.

The lives of normal adult humans contain all manner of experiences that go to make up its content, where the variety of kinds of experiences on offer for many of us is precisely part of the attraction of trying to live a full life. Birth, marriage, encounters, partings, divorce, hate, love, jealousy, suspicion, battle, war, death; things like this go to make up many of our lives and form some of the benchmarks by which we in part try to assess them, even though, at the time, hedonistically, things looked rather bleak. What the person who eats only desserts has missed is all the other various dimensions in which normal adult humans can live their lives, and when we pity those humans among us who do not have normal adult human lives we in part do so, not because we think, hedonistically, that their lives contain less pleasure than ours, but because we know that they will not be able to live lives the various dimensions of which look anything like those present in normal adult human lives. They will live human lives;

they are, obviously, human. But they will not live human lives anything like what such lives can be, when all the various dimensions of human life are taken into account; and what they will be judged to be short on is not pleasurable experiences (they may or may not be short on these) but on all the kinds of experiences that can go to make up human lives. In short, we have an idea of what it is to live a rich, full life, of what it is to have a life that develops and stretches our talents in ways which indicate the full dimensions of what human life can be like. Eating desserts comes nowhere near capturing these dimensions. It seems an obvious truth that we desire more things than pleasure, an obvious truth that desire-satisfaction can be felt or experienced without any accompanying pleasure, and an obvious truth that pleasure comes nowhere near exhausting all of what life has to offer. Pain and suffering often attend the attempts to satisfy desires that stretch us in particular ways, but where these desires form part of our conception of the good, we rarely give up those desires for that reason alone.

As for living spontaneously, how exactly are we to interpret this injunction? There are neurosurgeons, librarians, athletes, and pianists: how exactly are they to live spontaneously? Does this injunction mean that these individuals must not have professions in the first place? But then how are they to live? And what kind of society is Gruzalski envisaging for us, when professions and other ways of organizing our lives are put aside in favor of spontaneous living? In fact, all Gruzalski's point comes to is the caution that we can become too pre-occupied with an organized life and a job or profession and so fail to capture in our lives many of the other good things that life has to offer. But this caution is already widely heeded: no one is a schoolteacher or pilot twenty-four hours a day, and it is easily possible in one's other time to experience all that Gruzalski describes, from good meals and the enjoyment of nature to reading the religious and quasi-religious thinkers that Gruzalski quotes in his paper. We all know this; that is why so many of us seek to develop the various dimensions through which humans can live their lives. We become cooks or athletes; we read poetry and novels; we watch baseball games and look at movies; we go for walks and camp in the mountains; we go to PTA meetings and attend neighborhood watch committees. The list is almost endless of the sorts of activities and experiences that we think make up the lives of normal adult humans,

including those who have professions. Of course, there will be people who neglect this kind of development, who are so single-minded in their pursuit of some end that that end comes to absorb their lives and so to squeeze out the pursuit of other ends. Far from regarding such a person as exemplifying all that normal adult human life can be, however, we actually regard such people as having missed a huge number of the dimensions of normal adult human life that can so enrich it. Balance in our lives, balance, e.g., between our professions and the other things that life has to offer, is required, and most of us have to work at achieving such balance, given how jobs and professions, with their implications for financial livelihood, can come to absorb us.

Moreover, I certainly reject the thought that animals are more "natural" and so "superior" to us because they do not require cognition or comparatively advanced rationality in order to live the lives appropriate to their species. There is nothing "unnatural" or "artificial" about cognition, rationality, or conceptualizing experience, and it is only a piece of romanticism, along the lines of painting pre-civilized men as "noble" savages or of suggesting that everything since the wheel has been corruption or a part of the "rat race," to pretend otherwise. The use of cognition, rationality, and conceptualization in no way renders a life ignoble *per se*, as one uses these further to enrich a life, even though it is true that these same characteristics can be used in morally wrong or dubious endeavors. For the fact of the matter is, at least on my view, that there is no inherent correlation between morality/immorality and a valuable life; even immoral people, people who, e.g., use their intellectual endowments to visit misery upon their neighbors, can have valuable lives.

The "judgmental" point that Gruzalski makes admits of a reply similar to that given with respect to the spontaneity charge. My pursuit of some conception of the good may indeed lead me to become dissatisfied with the way I am living my life at present and so may result in my not getting out of my present way of living all that it has to offer; but there is no necessity about this, and we require some argument to indicate why we should think any such failure to be inevitable. Even this, I am inclined to say, gives more credence to the point than it deserves; for, at least in some of the circumstances I have been describing thus far, being dissatisfied with the way one is presently living requires us to say in which dimensions of living we

find our life unsatisfactory. We look for those things that we feel we are being shortchanged over. We may have plenty of desserts and, so, pleasure in our lives, yet still find life unsatisfactory; this is not all that bad a thing, if it leads us to reflect that life has more to offer than our present way of living realizes for us. Once more, we do not judge one human life more successful than another merely through adding up pleasurable experiences and finding that one life contains 13 such experiences and the other 12. If any hedonist/utilitarian has ever thought this, it is because s/he has had, I think, an impoverished value theory.

It should now be evident why Gruzalski's points miss the thrust behind the claim that autonomy can be used to augment the value of a life. That thrust is not one of inevitability or certainty that possession of autonomy will inevitably or certainly enhance the value of a life (still less is it that autonomy *per se* makes human life more valuable than animal life). Rather, the thrust is that autonomy *can* be used for that purpose.

In my view, autonomy is instrumentally, not intrinsically, valuable. Its value depends upon the uses made of it, and, in the case of normal adult humans, those possible usages make all kinds of experiences available. To direct one's own life to secure what one wants, to make one's own choices as to spouse, job, and other significant affairs of life, to assume responsibility over a domain of one's life and so acquire a certain sense of freedom to act, to decide how one will live and to mold and shape one's life accordingly: these are the sorts of things that open up areas of enrichment in a life, with consequent effect upon that life's quality and value. They are things which show us living lives of multiple dimensions, which show whole ranges of experiences open to us by our having chosen to live this way as opposed to that. Equally, however, it is possible that nothing of the sort will issue from the exercise of one's autonomy; just because a life's value can be augmented through the exercise of autonomy in no way shows that it inevitably or always is so augmented. But it would be a mistake to overlook exactly what molding and shaping our lives in ways of our own choosing opens up to us, in terms of ranges of experiences that become available to us, e.g., through actually living the life of an athlete or pianist, and that we subsequently so avidly pursue.

The point behind the above discussion, of course, is to indicate ways in which the value of normal adult human lives can be augmented, ways in which humans

can open up wider dimensions in which they can live their lives, ways which are arguably deprived animals. It does not follow that animal life has no value (precisely the opposite is my view) or that animal life cannot have greater value than some human life (again, precisely the opposite is my view). Rather, what is centrally at issue is the *comparative value* of normal adult human life and animal life and how we are to go about deciding the matter.

On this issue of comparative value, Gruzalski is also unhelpful. Certainly, if we adopt some Eastern religion or some form of quasi-religious metaphysic or some "New Age" mantra, it is very possible that we might come to have a different view of animals and of how we stand to them. Indeed, we might come to take a different view of our relations to the animal kingdom (and the inanimate environment as well) without any specific religious impulses at all. This much is clear to all of us, through poetry, through cultural differences we encounter amongst the individuals who make up our society, and through exposure to the art of different ages and cultures. From these different, possible views of our relations to animals different, possible accounts of the comparative value of human and animal life may flow. Again, this much seems clear. But from the mere fact that there are different, possible accounts of this comparative value nothing follows per se about the adequacy of any single one. Argument must establish the soundness of such accounts, and if, e.g., one's claims about comparative value turn upon one's adoption of an Eastern religion or some religious or "New Age" metaphysic, then it is that religion or metaphysic that must be subjected to scrutiny. Merely to be able, *within* the fabric of that religion or metaphysic, to tell stories the purport of which is to have us believe all manner of things of animals and the value of their lives is not the kind of scrutiny of a view or metaphysic that is required.

My own account of how we are to decide the comparative value of human and animal life must equally be subject to scrutiny; that is, at the very least, I must have something to say, in addition to trying to assess the comparative value of these lives, for going about assessing it in the way I do. I have a number of reasons in this regard, but I have space here for only a few words on one of them.

One of the strengths of my position on the value of human and animal life, I believe, is that it coheres nicely with recent discussions of the value of life in medical ethics and allied areas: in a word, what matters

is not life but quality of life. The value of a life is a function of its quality, its quality of its richness, and its richness of its capacities and scope for enrichment. It matters, then, what a creature's capacities for a rich life are. The question is not whether a mouse's life has value; I agree that it does. The mouse, just like a man, has an unfolding series of experiences and can suffer, and it is perfectly capable of living out a life appropriate to its species. The question is about the life appropriate to its species. The question is whether the mouse's life approaches normal adult human life in quality (and so value), given its capacities and what these indicate about a life appropriate to its species, and this is a matter of the comparative value of such lives. It is on this basis, on the basis of greater richness and greater potentialities for enrichment that the claim that normal adult human life is more valuable than animal life takes shape and is defended. Since not all human lives have the same richness or potentiality for enrichment, however, not all human lives are equally valuable. In fact, some human lives can be so blighted, with little or no prospect for enrichment, that the quality of such lives can fall well below that of ordinary, healthy animals. I take the case of anencephalic infants, the brain dead, and those in the latter stages of senile dementia to be cases in point.



Plainly, then, the animal case receives no different treatment from the human case: both turn upon quality of life views and accounts of the richness and the scope for enrichment of the lives in question. Such a view of the value of life is not speciesist in any first-order sense (nor, as we shall see, in a second-order sense), wherein value questions are decided upon the basis of species membership.

Quality of life views of the sort described turn upon richness, and if we are to answer the question of the comparative value of human and animal life, we must inquire after the richness of their respective lives. *Intra-species* comparisons are sometimes difficult, as we learn in medical ethics, when we try to judge the respective quality of life of each of two human lives, but such comparisons are not completely beyond us.

They are made every day in our hospitals, in order, e.g., to allocate resources, etc. *Inter-species* comparisons of richness and quality of life are likely to be even more difficult, though again not impossible. Certainly, as we descend from the "higher" animals, we are likely to lose all behavioral correlates that we use to gain access to the interior lives of animals. Yet, more and more scientific work constantly appears that gives us a glimpse into animal lives, whether in captivity or in the wild. So, exactly how much we can know of the inner experiences of animals, of their subjective lives matters to our judgment of the value of their lives, just as it does in our case.

In our attempt to grasp the subjective experiences of animals, we must not use in some unreflective manner criteria appropriate for assessing the richness of human lives as if they applied straightforwardly to the animal case. I am not a speciesist in this second-order sense either. Rather, much as ethologists and animal behaviorists do, we must use all that we know about animals, especially those closest to us, in order to try to gauge the quality of their lives in terms appropriate to their species. Then, we must try to understand to what we allude when we speak of rich, full lives for mice and men. The fullest mouse life there has ever been, so science would seem at the moment to suggest, does not approach the full life of a human; the difference in capacities, and what these additional capacities make possible by way of further dimensions to human existence, is just too great. So, if one nevertheless wants to maintain that the mouse's life is as valuable as the life of a normal adult human, then it must be that, whatever the capacities of the mouse and however limited those capacities may be in depth and extent, they confer a richness upon the mouse's life that approximates the richness of the human's life, with all its different and additional capacities, and the ranges of experiences these make possible, in the typical human case. Evidence is needed to support this claim, since we will not ordinarily think this of the mouse by its behavior alone.

If we are to work with a quality of life view of the value of a life, both human and animal, then we must try imaginatively to place ourselves in the mouse's position, with the capacities and life of the mouse. Difficult, yes, but not impossible.

One might try to block my judgment of reduced richness in the animal case by dropping the provision that quality of life is determined by richness. But if it is

not to be determined by richness, that is, by the extent, variety, depth, and quality of experiences, I do not know what else is to determine it.

Why cannot we say that the mouse and the man have different capacities and lives, so that, judged by their respective capacities, each leads a rich, full though different life? The problem here has a deeper aspect: one seems to be saying that these lives, and so the ingredients that make up these lives, are in some sense incommensurable, when, in fact, the central ingredients, namely, experiences and the unfolding of experiences in a life, appear remarkably alike. Can I know what it's like to be a dog? To a more or less extent. That is why I think playing with a dog enriches its life. Can I know exactly how much it enriches its life? No, just as I sometimes cannot know the degree of enrichment in the case of humans. But I have no reason whatever to believe that the dog's life possesses anything like the variety and depth of ways of enrichment that my life possesses, and I need evidence to make me believe that enrichment of the dog's life *through any single one of its capacities* could make up for this extent and variety in my case. To be sure, the eagle can see further and deeper than I can, but how does this fact transform the richness of its life to approximate the richness that all the variety and depth of my capacities confers upon me? I need evidence to believe that it does.

I doubt, then, that there are incommensurabilities present here, so that I am not thereby *in principle* denied access to the animal case. In the end, I believe that this is the most important point to establish, in order to pursue and to have any hope of resolving the comparative value questions; for this point would in turn tend to support the view that the difficulties in fully assessing the quality of life of at least the "higher" animals are ones of degree, not of kind.

With a quality of life view of the value of a life that takes the above form, it will not be true that all human lives are equally valuable, whatever their richness or scope for enrichment. I reject the so-called argument from "marginal cases" (tragic human cases) then, because the point about differing degrees of richness and scope for enrichment settles the question of whether human lives can have differing qualities and, so, values. One cannot use this argument over unfortunate humans, therefore, to try to squeeze in a claim for equal quality and value for animal lives.

Let me stress, then, that on a quality of life view of the value of a life of the sort sketched, the human and

animal cases are seen as remarkably alike in the role that experiences and experiences unfolding in a life play. What the animal case has to contend with, so far as normal adult humans are concerned, is the extent, variety, quality, and depth of experiences that are available to humans through the multiple dimensions of our lives, some of which are made available to us through the exercise of our autonomy. Nothing in all this says that human lives are more valuable than animal lives *because* they are autonomous lives; all autonomy does, *at best*, is to make ranges of experiences available to humans. Even without autonomy, animal lives are valuable, since animals remain experiential creatures, but without autonomy, human lives are not as valuable as they can be, since the full range of the experiences such lives are capable of through the additional capacities that normal adult human lives typically possess is not present.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> See especially my articles "The Significance of Agency and Marginal Cases," *Philosophica*, vol. 39, 1987; "Autonomy and the Value of Animal Life," *The Monist*, vol. 70, 1987; and "Moral Standing, the Value of Lives, and Speciesism," *Between The Species*, vol. 4, 1988.

<sup>2</sup> See especially my books *Interests and Rights: The Case Against Animals* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1980) and *Rights, Killing, and Suffering* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1983).

<sup>3</sup> Doubtless part of the explanation for this is to be traced to general interest in moral philosophy in the topic of autonomy.

<sup>4</sup> See, e.g., "Vivisection, Morals and Medicine," in T. Regan, P. Singer, eds., *Animal Rights and Human Obligations* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ, Prentice-Hall, 1989), pp. 223-236; "Animal Parts, Human Wholes: On the Use of Animals as a Source of Organs for Human Transplant," in J. M. Humber, R. F. Almeder, eds., *Biomedical Ethics Reviews 1987* (Clifton, NJ, Humana Press, 1988), pp. 89-101; "The Ethics of the Search for Benefits: Animal Experimentation in Medicine," in R. Gillon, ed., *The Principles of Health Care Ethics* (New York, John Wiley, 1989); "The Ethics of Using Animals for Human Benefit," in T. B. Mepham, G. A. Tucker, J. Wiseman, eds., *Issues in Agricultural Bioethics* (Nottingham, University of Nottingham Press, 1995); and "Medicine, Animal Experimentation, and The Moral Problem of Unfortunate Humans," *Social Philosophy and Policy*, vol. 13, 1996, pp. 181-210.

<sup>5</sup> Carl Cohen, "The Case for the Use of Animals in Biomedical Research," *New England Journal of Medicine*, vol. 14, 1986, pp. 865-870.

## Reply: The Instrumental Value of Autonomy

Bart Gruzalski

Pacific Center for Sustainable Living

The best-laid schemes o' mice an' men  
Gang aft aglay,  
An' lea'e us naught but grief an' pain,  
For promised joy!"

Robert Burns<sup>1</sup>

Philosophers have cited autonomy as the reason for thinking that the lives of normal adult humans are more valuable than the lives of nonhuman animals. In "Autonomy and the Orthodoxy of Human Superiority" (hereafter, "Orthodoxy"), I questioned what value autonomy adds to a life: are our lives better off because we are autonomous and therefore have the ability to pursue what we think of as the "good life"? If we take an external perspective, the answer is plausibly negative: because of our pursuits of what we think is a "good life," we have committed genocide, created nuclear weapons, caused numerous extinctions, and wrecked havoc on the earth's ecosystem. But if we take an inner perspective, it seems plausible that an ability to choose our own idea of the good life and mold our life to accommodate that idea adds positive value to that life.

This value might be added in one of two ways. It could be that our lives are inherently more valuable because of these capacities or that our lives are more valuable because of the instrumental value of these capacities. R. G. Frey holds the instrumental position, claiming that the exercise of autonomy enriches a life, causing "considerable satisfaction." In investigating



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