Response:
Language and Thought

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Professor Lynch has given us an interesting and challenging paper which covers a great deal of territory. One way of dividing up his project is to view it as comprising three main parts:

1. Textual analysis designed to discredit attempts to enlist Wittgenstein as an ally in arguments that animals without language cannot have conscious mental states, or at least some important kinds of mental states.[1]

2. Further criticisms designed to show that other attempts—e.g. those associated with Malcolm, Davidson, and Stich—to push the same general type of argument also fail; and

3. a brief discussion of the relevance of all this for arguments about the moral status of non-linguistic animals, in which he argues that such linguistic considerations, even if correct, fail to show that non-linguistic creatures cannot have rights. More importantly, they do not affect the broader "psychological and moral connection between human and animal" that gives rise to a sense of community, sympathy, and sometimes pity.

Let me comment briefly on each of these.

It should be emphasized that the sort of language at issue here is a public, conventional, *systematic* language. Neither a private Fodor-style language of thought (if there is one) nor the ability to send and receive "signals" is sufficient to establish the possession

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of a language in the sense relevant to these debates. The sorts of linguistic argument we are considering here depend (non-exclusively) on either the Gricean-style complex social interactions involved in engaging in language games or the recognition of one's utterances as having semantic properties, including meaning and truth-value.

Lynch has, I believe, convincingly established that Wittgenstein freely attributes a wide range of psychological states to animals. Thus, it is a mistake to cite Wittgenstein in support of claims that animals are not conscious.[2] However, this should not lead us to overlook Wittgenstein's insistence that some states are possible only for creatures who possess a language, and that engaging in a wide variety of language games is essential to human forms of life. Wittgenstein would insist that non-linguistic animals are incapable of a great many psychological states simply because they lack a public language. This difference does, for Wittgenstein, set animals apart from humans in very significant ways and entails that the "forms of life" we engage in will be very different. In turn, these differences will severely restrict the extent to which we can understand or interact meaningfully with animals, since understanding and interaction presuppose a shared form of life. Without such understanding and interaction, it is doubtful that Wittgenstein would accept appeals to a moral community, such as the one at the end of Lynch's paper.

Wittgenstein and others present the ability to use language as relevant to having certain mental states in two distinct ways. The first sees language primarily as a tool for representing concepts that may be too complex or abstract to be captured by other means, but which are necessary in order to have an intentional state with a specific content. Thus, we may be willing to credit a dog with the belief that she will be taken out to play "soon" (or as George Carlin would have it "RIGHT NOW") but not with the belief that she will go home next Wednesday. Representing concepts like "every two weeks," "the square root of two," or perhaps "the finality of death" seems to require a certain sort of complex language that goes far beyond what we usually attribute to most nonhuman animals.

Second, the ability to use a language may be necessary to have certain sorts of mental states: one might reasonably think that a bird expects a predator to follow her if she behaves in a certain way without believing that she is capable of judging that the statement "predators are more likely to be distracted

by potential prey they believe to be wounded" is true. Some, but not all, types of mental states presuppose an understanding of how language works. This includes, in some cases, an understanding of what it means for a statement to be true or false, where this is more complex than an understanding that a certain state of affairs does or does not obtain. It also may include "second-order" beliefs and desires about the expected effects on the audience. One might, along these lines, distinguish expecting from hoping, simulating pain from pretending to be in pain.[3]

Neither of these theses about the importance of language entails that non-linguistic animals have no mental states, but it is still important to recognize the difference between them. Wittgenstein clearly thinks that both these claims about the role of language are true, but many discussions of his view and other arguments about the role of language, both positive and negative, seem to focus on one version of the claim to the exclusion of the other or to collapse the two. Thus, when Lynch claims:

> Presumably, Wittgenstein is only contending that some mental states are possible only for creatures with linguistic capacity. Some beliefs, for example, are too finely grained to be attributed reasonably to an infralinguistic organism.

he seems to be lumping these two putative functions of language competence together. Similarly, Jeffrey's reply to Malcolm (as described in Lynch's paper) focuses on what the content of a mental state might be, whereas Malcolm is (at least, on the most charitable reading of his argument) more interested in what sorts of mental states a dog is capable of having.

Other attempts to use lack of language as a basis for attributing lack of (some) mental capacity require the same consideration of these two different ways in which a lack of language is thought to be significant. Stich is clearly concerned with the possible content of beliefs. Malcolm, Davidson, and Frey are arguing about the possibility of an animal having certain types of mental states: states which they think require framing and understanding a proposition and, in some cases, understanding that propositions are bearers of truth value. It may be of interest to note that Dennett, often cited by Lynch and others as an ally in the fight to attribute mental states to animals, nonetheless argues

quite vigorously that a lack of language imposes both sorts of limitations on animals.[4]

Finally, let me turn briefly to the significance of all of this for moral issues about our treatment of animals. I agree with Lynch that none of this has any bearing on the question of whether animals have rights; that is a debate that must be carried out on a separate field. However, I think each of the two theses about the importance of language raises separate concerns which must be considered before we can embrace Lynch's (and Diamond's) endorsement of a sense of moral community. They do so by suggesting that very significant, morally relevant differences may still exist between (normal, adult) humans and (nonlinguistic) animals.

The need for a complex and abstract language in fixing the content of mental states has sometimes been cited in debates about whether death is a harm for animals or whether animals can have a general interest in freedom or liberty. If animals cannot form a representation of freedom *per se* (as distinct from the representation of "that fence that is preventing me from getting away from here"), that may well affect our arguments about animal welfare. What sorts of mental states a non-linguistic creature is capable of having is particularly relevant when considering questions of self-awareness, autonomy, and self-determination. Is an animal capable of pride, self-awareness, or formulating and choosing a life plan? There is, of course, much more that needs to be said about these topics, but Lynch's analysis provides a useful starting point.

References Cited

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Notes

[1] Lynch is correct in his paraphrase of Singer's remarks. However, I think Singer has overstated the scope of the arguments to which he refers. Philosophers like Malcolm,

Davidson, and R. G. Frey, who seem to appeal to the Wittgensteinian tradition, argue for a more narrow thesis, viz., that animals cannot have certain sorts of mental states, although they may well possess other conscious states. Carruthers argues that animals have no conscious states, and does link consciousness with the ability to use a natural language, but does not explicitly invoke Wittgenstein. In fact, Leahy is the only appropriate target I am aware of, in that he explicitly appeals to Wittgenstein in his arguments to show that animals lack "awareness." Absent further references from Singer, it is difficult to know exactly to whom he wishes to attribute the more extreme claim.

[2] We should remember, however, that for Wittgenstein, these psychological states should not be thought of as inner, private events—either for animals or humans.

[3] For further discussion of the concept of deception, see Russow and other papers in Mitchell and Thompson (1986).

[4] In "How to Change Your Mind" (Dennett, 1978), Dennett argues that animals can have beliefs, but not opinions. They can come to believe, but not decide, assent, or judge. In later discussions (e.g., Dennett 1991, ch 8) he analyzes the role language plays in determining what the content of our beliefs could be.

Reply

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Prof. Russow invokes a distinction regarding the relevance of language to mind that she believes is overlooked in my paper. First, there is the thesis that some mental states involve concepts that seem to be too complex to be captured by creatures without language; e. g., dogs *might* have expectations, but dogs cannot expect to be taken out next Wednesday. The second thesis is that language may be necessary in order to have certain *types* of mental states. Among Russow's examples here is understanding what it is for a certain proposition to be true. Clearly, such an understanding requires language. So, restrictions of the first kind deny certain states to animals due to conceptual complexity, while restrictions of the second kind restrict which types of states might reasonably be attributed to animals.

Now, this is an interesting distinction, but I don't believe it was overlooked—at least not by me. Russow says that Wittgenstein presents the relevance of language to mentality in these two distinct ways. This may be, but there is little evidence that he had this distinction in mind. Indeed, in the passage from the *Investigations* cited in the first section of my paper, Wittgenstein lumps together restrictions due to complexity of conceptual content (dog cannot believe his master will come the day after tomorrow but does have other beliefs) with restrictions of type (a dog cannot be hopeful).

Nevertheless, Russow's distinction is a meaningful one. To exemplify the distinction, she correctly observes that Stich focuses on possible belief *contents*, while Malcolm, Davidson, and others are more interested in which *types* of mental states animals can have. However,

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