

BETWEEN THE SPECIES

Fellow Creatures: The Humean Case for Animal Ethics

ABSTRACT

In this article, I follow up on a suggestion made by Josephine Donovan that a Hume-inspired ethic of sympathy would be a better foundation for an animal ethic than more rationalistic approaches of both utilitarianism and deontology. I then expand on Donovan's suggestion by further suggesting that Hume's "sentiment of humanity" could easily be expanded to include other animals. Hume's ethic of sympathy, I argue, answers the need for an ethic that is at once both personal, contextual, and sufficiently universalizable to incorporate the political need for something like justice. I say, "something like justice," because animals are explicitly ruled out of justice relationships by Hume due to his more narrow definition of that term. What I mean by "something like justice" is a more impersonal and objective element (Hume's "general point of view") that transcends exclusively personal or private interests.

MARK CAUSEY
Georgia College and State University

Volume 18, Issue 1

Aug 2015

© *Between the Species*, 2015
<http://digitalcommons.calpoly.edu/bts/>

Introduction

Two recent collections of feminist care ethics as it applies to animal ethics, *Beyond Animal Rights: A Feminist Caring Ethic for the Treatment of Animals* (1996) and *The Feminist Care Tradition in Animal Ethics* (2007), seek a new theoretical foundation for animal ethics beyond the traditional utilitarian or deontological bases provided by Singer and Regan respectively. Both anthologies include articles critical of Singer's and Regan's dismissal of emotion in favor of "pure" reason. In this article, I follow up on Josephine Donovan's provocative suggestion that a Hume-inspired ethic of sympathy would be a better foundation for an animal ethic than more rationalistic approaches of both utilitarianism and deontology (1994). I expand on Donovan's suggestion by further suggesting that Hume's "sentiment of humanity" could easily be expanded to include at least other animals and perhaps even the larger ecosystem itself (although I will have to leave that task to another time). Hume's ethic of sympathy, I argue, answers the need, acknowledged by several of the contributors to the anthologies mentioned above, for an ethic that is at once both personal, contextual, and sufficiently universalizable to incorporate the political need for something like justice. I say, "something like justice," because animals, as we will see, are explicitly ruled out of justice relationships by Hume due to his more narrow definition of that term. What I mean here by "something like justice" is a more impersonal and objective element that transcends exclusively personal or private interests.

Role of the Sentiments

While Hume privileges the role of the emotions or sentiments in our moral judgments, Singer and Regan go out of their way to distance themselves from emotion. Peter Singer, comparing the cases of animal experimentation with the types

of medical experiments the Nazi doctors performed on human beings writes (in the Preface to the original 1975 edition of *Animal Liberation*) that, “The ultimate justification for opposition to both of these kinds of experiments, though, is not emotional. It is an appeal to basic moral principles which we all accept, and the application of these principles to the victims of both kinds of experiment is demanded by reason, not emotion” (2009, P.S., 11). Singer prides himself that, “Nowhere in [*Animal Liberation*]...do I appeal to the reader’s emotions where they cannot be supported by reason” (2009, P.S., 10). His reasoning being apparently that, “The portrayal of those who protest against cruelty to animals as sentimental, emotional ‘animal lovers’ has had the effect of excluding the entire issue of our treatment of nonhumans from serious political and moral discussion.” Compare this with Regan: “Since all who work on behalf of the interests of animals are more than a little familiar with the tired charges of being ‘irrational,’ ‘sentimental,’ ‘emotional,’ or worse, we can give the lie to these accusations only by making a concentrated effort not to indulge our emotions or parade our sentiments. And that requires making a sustained commitment to rational inquiry” (2004, *lii*). Or later and even more forcefully: “reason—not sentiment, not emotion—reason compels us to recognize the equal inherent value of...animals and...their equal right to be treated with respect” (quoted in Donovan 1990, 59). But as Donovan notes: “Regan’s and Singer’s rejection of emotion and their concern about being branded sentimentalist are not accidental, rather, they expose the inherent bias in contemporary animal rights theory towards rationalism, which, paradoxically, in the form of Cartesian objectivism, established a major theoretical justification for animal abuse” (1990, 59). Or as Brian Luke points out, “Both [Singer and Regan] insist that they are relying on reason alone, and not emotion, to establish their animal liberationist conclusions. But the

crucial step in their arguments, that humans and other animals are relevantly similar, cannot be established by reason alone” (1992, 127). For that, sympathy is required, as Luke goes on to demonstrate. Although he does not reference Hume explicitly, this is a very Humean move.

Hume’s assertion that: “Reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them” (1978, 414-415) is well known. For Hume, reason alone is insufficient to generate our moral judgments of approbation or disapprobation. In his *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, Hume writes:

But though reason, when fully assisted and improved, be sufficient to instruct us in the pernicious or useful tendency of qualities and actions; it is not alone sufficient to produce any moral blame or approbation. Utility is only a tendency to a certain end; and were the end totally indifferent to us, we should feel the same indifference towards the means. It is requisite a *sentiment* should here display itself, in order to give a preference to the useful above the pernicious tendencies. **This sentiment can be no other than a feeling for the happiness of mankind [sic], and a resentment of their misery;** since these are the different ends which virtue and vice have a tendency to promote (1975, 286 **bold mine**).

Borrowing from Hume and expanding the scope, I would like to propose a new basis for a liberatory animal ethics based on a similar, slightly modified moral sentiment:

**A feeling for the happiness of all sentient beings,
and a resentment of their misery.**

Although Hume himself never made this move from “humanity” to “all sentient beings” (he wrote the words I quote above a good two centuries prior to Peter Singer’s *Animal Liberation* after all), I see no reason, other than his situatedness in time and place, why he could not allow it. As Mary Midgley argues:

Morality...was for [Hume] not primarily an affair of reasoning at all, but of the feelings, especially the ‘sentiment of humanity’, which is a natural not an artificial virtue. ‘Humanity’ is here a wide and rather mysterious term covering a great range of sympathetic feeling. Most of the examples Hume gives of it deal with feeling for fellow-humans. And in principle it would be possible for an absolute dismitter to rule that, if it is a feeling of *humanity*, it cannot have a non-human object. But Hume sees no reason to make this arbitrary move. He treats the question of what beings we can sympathize with and feel indignant about as a genuinely empirical one, to be settled by experience (1983, 48).

Sympathy

To be able to sympathize with a being, human or nonhuman, would imply for Hume a certain resemblance to ourselves. Hume clearly assumes that we sympathize with other humans; indeed this is the basis for our moral sentiments. As Hume explains sympathy in the *Treatise*:

The minds of all men are similar in their feelings and operations, nor can any one be actuated by any affection, of which the others are not, in some degree, susceptible. As in strings equally wound up, the motion of

one communicates itself to the rest; so all the affections readily pass from one person to another, and beget correspondent movements in every human creature (1978, 576).

Thus sympathy works by a sort of emotional contagion. While it is true that Hume allows that, “Every human creature resembles ourselves, and by that means has an advantage above any other object, in operating on the imagination” (1978, 359), this need not rule out the possibility of a somewhat lesser sympathy for nonhumans. In fact, Hume himself invites us to “take a general survey of the universe, and observe the force of sympathy thro’ the whole animal creation, and the easy communication of sentiments from one thinking being to another” (1978, 363). So animals too share a sympathetic nature, and are, as we will see, also (*pace* Descartes) *thinking* beings, and as such can and do communicate their sentiments to us. For Hume, they need not be *equally* rational to be legitimate objects for our sympathy. He is clear that humans are superior in terms of rationality (1978, 610), but he also warns of setting the bar so high that we inadvertently exclude children or other humans from our definitions as well (1978, 177), a point often made by Singer and Reagan as well.

Hume is explicit about sympathy in animals. He writes: “‘Tis evident, that *sympathy*, or the communication of passions, takes place among animals, no less than among men” (1978, 398). Hume then gives some examples:

The howlings and lamentations of a dog produce a sensible concern in his fellows. And ‘tis remarkable, that tho’ almost all animals use in play the same member, and nearly the same action as in fighting; a lion, a

MARK CAUSEY

tyger, a cat their paws; an ox his horns; a dog his teeth; a horse his heels: Yet they most carefully avoid harming their companion, even though they have nothing to fear from his resentment; which is evident proof of the sense brutes have of each other's pain and pleasure (1978, 398).

Of course, it could be suggested that all this proves is that humans can and do sympathize with humans while animals can and do sympathize with their own kind. In other words, Hume has shown that sympathy works on an *intra*-species basis. The crucial question is: can it work on an *inter*-species basis? This is what Midgley's "absolute dismitter", as one who dismisses out of hand any claims made on behalf of animals' moral considerability, denies.

If sympathy works on a principle of sufficient resemblance to self, then the question becomes: do animals sufficiently resemble us to be able to elicit our sympathy? Are sentiments really communicable across species barriers? While Hume, to his credit, does not simply erase the species barriers—he avoids resolving *difference* into *sameness*—he does give us good reason to think there is sufficient resemblance to generate sympathetic feeling towards animals.

Resemblance

Animals share with us characteristics like: reason (1978, 176-179), beliefs (1978, 178), sympathy (1978, 398); as well as direct passions like fear, anger, courage, and grief (1978, 398); and indirect passions like pride and humility (1978, 324-328), and love and hatred (1978, 397-398). Again, the claim is not that these operate in exactly the same way or to the same extent in animals as in humans, but rather that there are corre-

lates. For example, while Hume, unlike most of his philosophic predecessors, finds it self-evident that animals have reason: “no truth appears to me evident, than that beasts are endow’d with thought and reason as well as men” (1978, 176), he also maintains the difference, “Men are superior to beasts principally by the superiority of their reason; and they are the degrees of the same faculty, which set such an infinite difference betwixt one man and another” (1978, 610). What this comment concerning the superiority of human reason makes plain, especially by including this mention of the (intraspecific) differences amongst humans in terms of reason, however, is that the difference between animal reason and human reason is a difference of *degree* rather than of *kind*. As Tom Beauchamp summarizes Hume’s position in the “Of the Reason of Animals” section of the *Treatise*, “In general, the human species is superior and possibly vastly superior in what we ordinarily think of as intelligence, but in degrees only, not in kind — and in some members only, not in all members” (1999, 327).

That Hume should attribute *indirect* passions to animals is highly significant. Indirect passions like pride and humility, for Hume, require a degree of self-consciousness:

‘Tis evident, that pride and humility, tho’ directly contrary, have yet the same object. This object is self, or that succession of related ideas and impressions, of which we have an intimate memory and consciousness” (1978, 277).

If this is the case for humans, it is also the case for animals: “The causes of these passions are likewise much the same in beasts as in us, making a just allowance for our superior knowledge and understanding” (1978, 326). As Hume consistently

maintains, “Thus all the internal principles, that are necessary in us to produce either pride or humility, are common to all creatures; and since the causes, which excite these passions, are likewise the same, we may justly conclude, that these causes operate after the same manner thro’ the whole animal creation” (1978, 328). Even the important role of secondary approval and affirmation that plays a part in human pride (1978, 316) seems to be shared by animals as well:

Add to this, that every species of creatures, which approach so often to man, as to familiarize themselves with him, show an evident pride in his approbation, and are pleas’d with his praises and caresses, independent of every other consideration. Nor are they the caresses of every one without distinction, which give them this vanity, but those principally of the persons they know and love; in the same manner as that passion is excited in mankind (1978, 326).

Like us, animals seem to care about what others, especially those who know them best, think of them.

It seems then that Hume has given us ample reason to believe that animals are sufficiently like us in relevant ways. Indeed, it seems that he has already laid the groundwork that both Singer and Regan will build upon, albeit in different directions, centuries later. It is too bad that they both ceded Hume’s ground of sympathy from the start.

Humean animals, then, are thinking and feeling beings who are sensitive to pleasures and pains who thus can suffer (1978, 176). This is, of course, the very criteria that Peter Singer proposes for their moral considerability. He bases his anti-speciesist ethic on Jeremy Bentham’s famous: “The question is not,

Can they *reason?* nor Can they *talk?* but, Can they *suffer?*” Singer insists that all suffering, no matter *whose*, is alike morally considerable. Species membership *per se* is irrelevant to the question of suffering. Just as Singer bases his animal ethic on this continuity between animals and humans (i.e. the equal ability to suffer), so too, as we have seen, does Hume emphasize the continuities between us and the other animals. But, as Baier points out, Hume goes much further. Hume’s scope goes beyond just pleasures and pains to take a whole gamut of complex emotional and cognitive similarities between the species. Turning the usual direction of the comparison from human to animal on its head, Baier notes that, “Hume emphasizes the continuities, and these continuities go well beyond shared sensitivity to pleasure and pain. Both in our cognitive habits and in our emotional range, human nature as Hume sees it is a special case of animal nature” (1985, 147).

Darwin himself could not have said it better. As Antony Pison argues, “Hume’s recognition of the fundamental similarities and continuities between human and animal nature...represents a philosophical revolution in which the view of man as a unique creation in God’s image is replaced with that of man as a natural object differing only in degree from other animals” (1993, 301). Or, as Tom Beauchamp puts it, “Like Darwin after him, Hume had a powerful way of demythologizing the idea that humans have some magical capacity that distances them as a species from the rest of creation” (1999, 332).

By emphasizing, even more than the mere sensitivity to pleasures and pains, the other cognitive and emotive continuities between humans and animals, including a degree of self-consciousness, Hume also seems to have anticipated Regan’s

subject-of-a-life criterion for his animal ethic. For Regan, one is the subject-of-a-life if:

They have beliefs and desires; perceptions, memory, and a sense of the future, including their own future; an emotional life together with feelings of pleasure and pain; preference- and welfare-interests; the ability to initiate action in pursuit of their desires and goals; a psychophysical identity over time; and an individual welfare in the sense that their experiential life fares well or ill for them, logically independently of their utility for others and logically independent of their being the object of anyone else's interests (2004, 243).

All of these characteristics listed by Regan above Hume ascribes, either explicitly or implicitly, to at least some other animals (again there are degrees of difference here just as in the human case as well). Where Hume and Regan part company is over the question of rights and justice. Hume explicitly denies that animals can be included in notions of justice. But, that does not mean, as I will argue, that they are entirely excluded from the moral community or that we have no other moral duties towards them. As Beauchamp observes:

[I]f animals have these properties, then perhaps they merit whatever moral protections humans enjoy by virtue of having the same or relevantly similar properties...Hume does not appear to have set out to prove in this way that animals merit increased moral protections, but he opened the door to this conclusion with his psychology and moral philosophy. Paradoxically, this point may turn out to be Hume's most enduring

legacy in today's moral controversies about the human use of nonhuman animals (1999, 332).

Justice

Justice for Hume is an artificial virtue. It is inextricably connected to property rights. Thus to exclude animals from justice is simply to point out that animals do not have property rights—they cannot be said to own property (Valls 2012, 14). For Hume, in a world of superabundance or “extensive benevolence” there would have never arisen any notion or need for justice. Likewise, in situations of extreme need the laws of justice are suspended (1975, 183-188). Justice assumes a community of equals. To illustrate this, Hume offers the following thought experiment:

Were there a species of creatures intermingled with men, which, though rational, were possessed of such inferior strength, both of body and mind, that they were incapable of all resistance, and could never, upon the highest provocation, make us feel the effects of their resentment; the necessary consequence, I think, is that we should be bound by the laws of humanity to give gentle usage to these creatures, but should not, properly speaking, lie under any restraint of justice with regard to them, nor could they possess any right or property, exclusive of such arbitrary lords. Our intercourse with them could not be called society, which supposes a degree of equality; but absolute command on the one side, and servile obedience on the other. Whatever we covet, they must instantly resign: Our permission is the only tenure, by which they hold their possessions: Our compassion and kindness the only check, by which to curb our lawless will: And as no inconvenience ever

results from the exercise of a power, so firmly established in nature, the restraints of justice and property, being totally *useless*, would never have place in so unequal a confederacy.

This is plainly the situation of men, with regard to animals... (1975, 190-191).

It is important to note that right after the passage just quoted Hume immediately draws parallels between the European's treatment of "barbarous Indians" and even men's treatment of women (Kuflik 1998). As Andrew Valls interprets this passage, for Hume the concept of justice involves a regimen of "general and inflexible" rules (property rules) and their application for the benefit of society as a whole (Hume 1978, 532). Even though particular cases of justice may offend our natural sentiments, we agree to abide by the rules of justice in order to gain the benefits and security of living in society. As Valls puts it:

The point is that to participate in a regime of rules determining property, one must be able to understand and act in accordance with fairly abstract rules. It is this capacity that Hume thought that nonhuman animals lack (Kuflik 1998). And since they lack this capacity they are not the sort of creatures who can respect the property rights of others, or possess such rights themselves (2012, 14).

The crucial thing to note here, however, is that justice is by no means the whole, or even the most important part, of morality for Hume. Just because we do not "lie under the restraint of justice" to animals, does not mean we have no moral obligations to them. "For Hume," as Midgley notes, "exclusion from justice is by no means exclusion from morality" (1983, 48). We

are, after all, bound by the “laws of humanity” to give them gentle usage. Baier explains:

Animals, Hume says, have no sense of property or right, and so there can be no question of any obligations, based on convention or agreement, either on their part or owed to them. Hume would reject any attempt to give sense to the concept of rights of animals, since all rights arise from artifice. But since the artificial virtues are only a small subset of the virtues, the fact that animals have no obligations or rights would not mean that no moral wrongs can be done to them, nor even that they themselves have no ‘duties’ (1985, 147).

Moreover, as she concludes a few pages later:

The duties of justice will not be owed to them, but all the natural virtues will cover our treatment of animals. Because we can recognize what constitutes harm to them because they, like us, are potential victims of human vices, we have both sympathetic and self-interested reasons to condemn humanly inflicted harm to them (1985, 149).

Humanity

Whatever duties we have towards animals clearly arise for Hume not on the basis of rights or justice claims, but rather on grounds of “humanity.” In this way Hume can help us shift the contemporary debate away from “rights” and more towards our duties of care and benevolence. As Valls compellingly demonstrates in his paper, for Hume the laws of humanity are even more exalted and compelling than the laws of justice. *Humanity* for Hume is synonymous with *benevolence*, which is a natu-

ral virtue (Debes 2007). As Debes defines it, “humanity (as a principle of human nature) is more like a disposition towards benevolence, at least insofar as we conceptualize benevolence as the desire for another’s good” (2007, 29). The sentiment of humanity is activated, as Debes copiously demonstrates, through sympathy. Although Hume most often talks in terms of sympathy and feeling for other humans, there is good reason to think that for Hume the sentiment of humanity need not necessarily be so limited. Indeed, Hume at times seems to suggest there is no such thing as a love of humanity merely as such. Consider what he says in the *Treatise*:

In general, it may be affirm’d, that there is no such passion in human minds, as the love of mankind, merely as such, independent of personal qualities, of services, or of relation to ourself. ‘Tis true, there is no human, *and indeed no sensible, creature, whose happiness or misery does not, in some measure, affect us, when brought near to us, and represented in lively colors*: But this proceeds merely from sympathy, and is no proof of such an universal affection to mankind, *since this concern extends itself beyond our own species* (1978, 481 emphasis mine).

There is no simple love of “mankind” in the abstract. There is sympathy for the happiness or misery of concrete individuals, human or nonhuman, when this happiness or misery is made known to us, as it touches us. Hume thus avoids the abstracting sort of universalization that is often criticized in feminist ethics. Hume’s notion of sympathy requires some degree of personal connection and relatedness. It is contextual and individual. It need not be completely subjective, as we will see, but it is not just a theoretical abstraction either.

In the second *Enquiry*, Hume states of the sentiment of humanity:

If we consider the principles of the human make, such as they appear to daily experience and observation, we must, *a priori*, conclude it impossible for such a creature as man to be totally indifferent to the well or ill-being of his fellow creatures, and not readily, of himself, to pronounce, where nothing gives him any particular bias, that what promotes their happiness is good, that which tends to their misery is evil, without any further regard or consideration (1975, 230).

While “fellow creatures” here could appear to simply refer to fellow *human* ones, a few paragraphs later Hume makes it clear that the feeling of humanity includes *both* “mankind” *and* “our fellow creatures.” This passage is crucial because here Hume makes his strongest case for the importance that he places on the feeling of humanity: “that it is a foundation of the chief part of morals, which has reference to *mankind and our fellow creatures*” (1975, 231 emphasis mine). By stipulating *both* “mankind” *and* fellow creatures, Hume is explicitly stating here that “our fellow creatures”, i.e. the other animals, *are indeed part of our moral community*. They *are* morally considerable.

Fellow Creatures

Reading “fellow creatures” as “animals” in the previous quotation we see that Hume takes it to be impossible for a sympathetic creature such as ourselves to be totally indifferent to their well or ill-being. Indeed such an indifferent person would be a sort of “monster” according to Hume. Hume asks us to imagine such a “fancied monster”:

Let us suppose a person originally framed so as to have no manner of concern for his fellow-creatures, but to regard the happiness and misery *of all sensible beings* with greater indifference than even two contiguous shades of the same color (1975, 235).

There can be no doubt that the difference between the person with humanity and this moral monster is precisely whether or not they care about the happiness and misery *of all sentient beings*. Thus, there is no reason to suppose that for Hume moral concern is limited to just members of our own species. It may not be a matter of more narrowly defined justice but rather it is one of humanity which is based on much broader sympathy.

That Hume most often refers specifically to humans is understandable in the sense that he was writing a *Treatise on Human Nature* and the *General Principles of (human) Morals* rather than books on animal ethics. My contention is that there was nothing, except perhaps historical circumstance, to prevent him from extending his explicit moral concern to animals themselves.

Unequals

The laws of humanity would appear to govern especially in cases of *inequality in power*. As Robert Shaver argues, “humanity is understood as the concern for others that operates between unequals and especially between parents and children” (1992, 553). Just as we would have no Humean duties of justice towards children, this certainly would not mean that we would have no moral duties towards them. As later feminist care-oriented ethics will have it, we have duties of care for those in positions of greater need. So for Hume is there a duty of benevolence owed by parents to children (1978, 478, 518) and even

by the rich to the poor (1978, 482); all examples of unequals in power. Hume likewise argues from the laws of humanity that we have duties to animals—our unequals in power. One of the dynamics that feminist care ethics has brought to the fore is that duties of care apply in situations of inequality. Children or the ill and disabled need care precisely because they are not in a position to take care of their own needs. Feminist theorists have critiqued the notion of autonomous and equal selves that are at the foundation of both utilitarian and rights theories for ignoring the embedded relations of care that have made and continue to make those selves possible. We all needed care in infancy, and will likely need care at various times throughout our lives and at our lives' end. Hume's duties of humanity or benevolence take this relational web into account.

Virtue and Vice

Hume is much more like a virtue theorist than a natural rights theorist. Benevolence is surely a virtuous character trait for him:

Here is a man, that does many benevolent actions; relieves the distress'd, comforts the afflicted, and extends his bounty to the greatest of strangers. No character can be more amiable and virtuous. We regard these actions as proofs of the greatest humanity (1978, 478).

Such a person meets with universal approbation. I would suggest that we feel the same natural approbation for those who are kind to animals and a natural disapprobation for those who are engage in cruelty towards them. While benevolence is most admirable and virtuous, cruelty is the “most detested of all the vices” (Hume 1978, 605, cf., 296, 470). There can be little doubt that many of the common practices in modern indus-

trial animal farming constitute cruelty: debeaking, dehorning, and castration all without anesthetic; confinement in gestation crates, veal hutches, and battery cages with little or no room to move or even lie down; the deprivation of sunlight and fresh air along with the frustration of almost all natural tendencies; and the list goes on. These practices would legally constitute cruelty if done to our companion animals. It is only because of exemptions for farmed animals that they are not legally considered animal cruelty. Most people seeing undercover video from animal groups documenting these practices experience natural feelings of shock, disgust, sympathy and overall disapprobation.

Universalizability

It remains here to say a word about the universalizability of Hume's ethic of sympathy and why that might be important. Feminist ethics has tried to counterbalance the prevailing trends, evident in both utilitarianism and deontology, towards mathematical abstraction and atomism with its focus on the personal, contextual, and relational. Carol Gilligan's groundbreaking work, *In a Different Voice*, contrasts justice with caring in this regard (see Luke 2007). Regan has criticized the care tradition of ethics for failing to provide a sufficiently universalizable ethic that can include those outside of one's immediate circle. "What are the resources within the ethic of care that can move people to consider the ethics of their dealings with individuals who stand outside the existing circle of their valued interpersonal relationships?", he asks, "Unless we supplement the ethic of care with some other motivating force—some other grounding of our moral judgment—we run the grave risk that our ethic will be excessively conservative and will blind us to those obligations we have to people [or animals] for whom we are indifferent" (quoted in Luke 2007, 133, see also Donovan

1994, 184). Donovan counters that one clearly can and often does feel sympathy for complete strangers. She and other feminist care theorists, like Virginia Held do not see the personalist emphasis of feminist ethics to be necessarily so exclusive as to apply only to those one personally knows. But they are at the same time *particular others* rather than mathematical abstractions as in the utilitarian calculus or “all rational beings” as deontologists prefer (Donovan 1994, 185). There is the recognition amongst many care ethicists that without losing the personal and contextual element there also needs to be a political (more like what I am calling a “justice” element) as well. Ecofeminist Deane Curtin, for example, calls for a “politicized ethic of care” (Curtin 1991). The oppression of women and their relegation to the private, domestic sphere certainly has its political elements. And, like the oppression of women, that of other historically disenfranchised peoples (including nonhuman animals) and even the Earth itself under patriarchal and colonizing dominion shares certain features in common and there are natural alliances to be forged in the liberatory struggles against these systems of domination and oppression.

Hume’s ethic of sympathy, I think, provides a way to sufficiently universalize ethical norms without overly abstracting and rationalizing. Hume relies on our ability to take a “general view” and to take a somewhat objective view of the situation. Almost as if he is responding to Regan and other critics of care ethics who, like Kant before them, worry that sentiments like sympathy are too fickle and not evenly distributed amongst us, Hume writes:

But as this sympathy is variable, it may be thought, that our sentiments of morals must admit of all the same variations. We sympathize more with persons contigu-

ous to us, than with persons remote from us: With our acquaintance, than with strangers: With our countrymen, than with foreigners. But notwithstanding this variation of our sympathy, we give the same approbation to the same moral qualities in *China* as in *England*. They appear equally virtuous, and recommend themselves equally to the esteem of a judicious spectator (1978, 581).

Hume recognizes that it is natural for us to favor those closest and dearest to us. But he also thinks that we can recognize a virtue when we see it, across distances and even time (we even approve of virtuous deeds and characters from the past). We all have our own embodied and embedded perspective on the world. I cannot see things through your eyes. We would never be able then to even communicate with one another, Hume reasons, unless we could take up some “*steady* and *general* points of view” (1978, 581-582). Humans, and this is precisely our advantage over the other animals and the reason we are moral agents, are able to abstract ourselves enough from the situation to take a more general view. We can form general ethical principles based on empirical observation of what most often tends towards the good of all concerned. But this is not a simple utilitarian calculus. It is based on sympathetic feeling and our ability to imaginatively and empathetically take up an other’s concrete position. It is the virtue itself and the character it gives rise to that we approve of, not simply the consequence in a particular case. The virtues themselves, especially benevolence, produce pleasurable feelings within us. A virtuous character is more likely to tend towards the benefit of all over the long haul. This was the quality, the general tendency towards the general welfare, that Hume approved of in justice. It is this unique ability to take up a general view while at the same time always

remaining a sympathetic, embodied, and embedded self that grounds Hume's ethic.

Conclusion

Hume is far more optimistic about human nature than his Calvinistic forbearers and contemporaries. He assumes that we can and do care about the happiness or misery of others, including animals. Hume further assumes that it is this sympathy and the feelings of approbation or disapprobation that it generates are what move us to act in ethical ways. Reason alone will never bring about the more ethical treatment of animals many of us seek. But sympathy driven care can. The industry which profits from animal exploitation knows this and does all it can to keep the animals suffering hidden from our sympathetic view. Once the connection is made, however, as Bob Comis (2014), Howard Lyman, Harold Brown, and many others can attest, the change begins (*Peaceable Kingdom*, 2012).

References:

- Baier, Annette. 1985. *Postures of the Mind: Essays on Mind and Morals*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Beauchamp, Tom L. 1999. "Hume on the Nonhuman Animal." *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy* 24: 322-335.
- Curtin, Deane. 1991. "Toward an Ecological Ethic of Care." In *The Feminist Care Tradition in Animal Ethics*, edited by Josephine Donovan and Carol J. Adams. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Comis, Bob. 2014. The Importance of Our Evolution Beyond Killing for Food. *Huffington Post*, January 3. <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/bob-comis/the-importance-of-our>

evolution-beyond-killing-for-food_b_4518133.html (accessed July 31, 2014).

Debes, Remy. 2007. "Humanity, Sympathy and the Puzzle of Hume's Second Enquiry." *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 15: 27-57.

Donovan, Josephine. 1990. "Animal Rights and Feminist Theory." In *The Feminist Care Tradition in Animal Ethics*, edited by Josephine Donovan and Carol J. Adams. New York: Columbia University Press.

Donovan, Josephine. 1994. "Attention to Suffering: Sympathy as a Basis for Ethical Treatment of Animals." In *The Feminist Care Tradition in Animal Ethics*, edited by Josephine Donovan and Carol J. Adams. New York: Columbia University Press.

Donovan, Josephine, and Carol J. Adams, eds. 1996. *Beyond Animal Rights: A Feminist Caring Ethic for the Treatment of Animals*. New York: Continuum.

Donovan, Josephine, and Carol J. Adams, eds. 2007. *The Feminist Care Tradition in Animal Ethics*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Hume, David. 1975. *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*. 3rd ed. Revised by P. H. Nidditch. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Hume, David. 1978. *A Treatise of Human Nature*. 2nd ed. Edited by L. A. Selby-Bigge, revised by P. H. Nidditch. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

MARK CAUSEY

- Kuflik, Arthur. 1998. "Hume on Justice to Animals, Indians and Women." *Hume Studies* 24: 53-70.
- Luke, Brian. 1992. "Justice, Caring, and Animal Liberation." In *The Feminist Care Tradition in Animal Ethics*, edited by Josephine Donovan and Carol J. Adams. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Midgley, Mary. 1983. *Animals and Why They Matter*. Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press.
- Piston, Anthony. 1993. "The Nature of Humean Animals." *Hume Studies* 19: 301-316. *Peaceable Kingdom: The Journey Home*. DVD. Directed by Jenny Stein. Ithaca, NY: Tribe of Heart Ltd., 2012.
- Regan, Tom. 2004. *The Case for Animal Rights*. Updated. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Shaver, Robert. 1992. "Hume on the Duties of Humanity." *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 30: 545-556.
- Singer, Peter. 2009. Updated. *Animal Liberation*. New York: Harper Perennial.
- Valls, Andrew. 2012. "Hume, Justice, and the Environment." Paper presented at the meeting of the Western Political Science Association, Portland, Oregon, March 22-24.