

## BETWEEN THE SPECIES

Review of  
*Fellow Creatures: Our Obligations  
to the Other Animals*

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**Publisher:** Oxford University Press

**Date of Publication:** September 2018

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Volume 23, Issue 1

Winter 2019

<http://digitalcommons.calpoly.edu/bts/>

John Koenig's long-running project, *The Dictionary of Obscure Sorrows*, aims to create new words that capture otherwise abstract emotions which often escape easy description - words like 'vellichor' ("the strange wistfulness of used bookstores"), 'silience' (the "unnoticed excellence that carries on around you every day, unremarkably"), and 'kuebiko' ("a state of exhaustion inspired by acts of senseless violence"). Featured by organizations like TED and NPR, one of Koenig's most famous neologisms is 'sonder,' the feeling in the moment that "each random passerby is living a life as vivid and complex as your own." Christine Korsgaard's new book *Fellow Creatures: Our Obligations to the Other Animals* aims to expand this perception of the value of another to include all creatures which have interests of their own - regardless of the species to which they happen to belong.

Laid out in three parts, this relatively short book offers a dense reformulation of one of the more notorious elements of Kant's normative position in its 250-odd pages, arguing that humans do have moral duties to nonhuman animals. Whereas Kant grounded much of his moral theory on a supposed need for reciprocity between moral agents, Korsgaard argues that there is no reason to suppose, on Kantian grounds, that a one-sided relational duty is not possible *if* we have good reasons for thinking that the object of that duty has moral standing. As she develops throughout Part One, any creature which has what she calls a 'final good' also has moral standing, regardless of whether or not that creature can conceptualize or respect either its own final good or the final good of others.

Derived from her reading of Aristotle, Korsgaard's sense of 'final goods' is contrastable with the notion of a functional good: whereas the latter captures evaluative uses of the con-

cept 'good' (as we typically apply it in ordinary discourse), the former entails that we consider something "worth having, realizing, or bringing about for its own sake" (2.1.3). By defining an animal as something with a representational system that perceives the world in a 'valenced' manner and acts based on that information (2.1.7), Korsgaard concludes that all animals, by definition, experience both functional and final goods insofar as valenced perceptions motivate actions. So, if Kantians are going to ground morality as the preservation of, or respect for, final goods (another way to express, she argues, the requirement to treat people as "ends in themselves"), then there is no reason to care about what species a given final-goods-holder happens to be.

To this sense of 'good,' Korsgaard adds the important notion that a good is 'tethered' to a particular creature in a particular context; that is to say, if something is important for a creature, "it cannot be cut loose from that creature without ceasing to be important at all" (1.3.2). Put differently, Korsgaard denies that goodness simply exists on its own; to be good is to be good for someone or something specific and there is "no real difference between being absolute and being relative to everyone" (1.3.2). Ultimately, she concludes that *all* value is perspectival, for "... values arise from the point of view of valuing creatures. And the values that arise from one point of view can be discordant with values that arise from another...[W]e can see the ethical life as an attempt to bring some unity or harmony into our various evaluative perspectives, by choosing those ends that are good for all of us" (4.5.1).

This perspectival understanding of goodness allows Korsgaard to reject several of the perpetual bugbears of conversations about human-animal-relations on the grounds that deter-

minations of comparative value are often incommensurable: how could one compare a ‘good-for X’ and a ‘good-for Y’ if the content of ‘good-for’ in each case is fundamentally different, given that X and Y are different? Consequently, Korsgaard concludes that a sentence like “humans are more important than animals” can be neither true nor false, thereby sweeping much of the debate about ‘speciesism’ off the agenda for discussion (4.3.6). Similarly, debates about the supposed superiority of particular capacities are meaningless; it’s not that Korsgaard disagrees with Mill’s famous claim that “it is better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a pig satisfied,” but rather that she insists on asking “better *for whom?*” with the understanding that a pig’s perspective on “the Good Life” involves much more straw than poetry (4.4.3).

In Part Two, Korsgaard specifically critiques Kant’s notion of duty in light of her perspectival definition of goodness as tethered to particular creatures and their situations. Kant thought, because they cannot reciprocate the legislation of our moral laws back upon us, nonhuman animals could not properly possess moral standing within the Kingdom of Ends, so any real duties that humans have with respect to animals, such as the duty to not kill a farmer’s cow, are actually indirect duties to other human beings - the duty is to the farmer, not the cow (6.2.2). In contrast, Korsgaard argues that the way in which humans derive moral laws for ourselves - in particular, the way in which we conceive of a being possessing moral standing - if applied consistently, happens to include nonhumans or, as she says, “rational beings legislate moral laws whose protections extend to the other animals” (8.1.1).

This is because of a crucial distinction Korsgaard makes between the ‘active’ and ‘passive’ sense of being an “end in itself.”

Much like the difference between being a moral agent and a moral patient, to actively be such an end is to be capable of *doing* the legislating of moral laws upon others; to be passive is to be the *recipient* of such considerations (8.5.1). Korsgaard contends that Kant conflated these two facets of end-legislation, but when they are distinguished they can easily expand his Kingdom of Ends to incorporate any creature that has a final good. If any final goods matter to a Kantian, then they *all* must matter; in Korsgaard's words, "the *content* of the presupposition behind rational choice is not automatically given by the fact that it is only rational beings who have to make it" (8.5.1).

A concerning problem, then, in light of her commitment to perspectival value, concerns the inevitable conflict of valuing agents whose disparate desires are mutually exclusive, particularly given the absolute intractability of nature to the expectations of rational agents. Because what is good for a lion and what is good for the lion's prey are manifestly in opposition, to recognize the rights of all nonhuman animals with final goods would seemingly eliminate any chance of actually achieving the Kingdom of Ends on Earth wherein everyone's goods are realized (8.8.3). But to this, Korsgaard responds that a consistent treatment of Kantian principles would not necessarily need to actually *accomplish* a comprehensive Kingdom of Ends so long as all living agents are *persistently* acting properly; as she says, "we do not do what is right in order to achieve the good, but in order to treat others in a way that accords with their value" (8.8.4).

The third and final part of *Fellow Creatures* stretches the sentiment of this last quote in a smattering of different directions as Korsgaard suggests applied considerations of her reformed-Kantian framework for defending animal rights.

Addressing topics ranging from the eating of meat to animal experimentation, service creatures in the military, the keeping of pets, and more, Korsgaard raises more questions than she answers in this section as she muses in a matter of paragraphs over topics which each deserve their own extended treatment.

One issue she centers, in 10.3.1, for example, is the tension between activists who push to eradicate predation in the wild (effectively requiring all creatures to become domesticated) and activists who support the organized extinction of bred animals (effectively requiring all creatures to become feral). By developing what she calls a 'creation ethic,' Korsgaard contends that both sides of this debate fall prey to the same category mistake, albeit in different directions: we are not responsible for the creation of wild animals, so domesticating and controlling them would be improper, but we are (in one sense) responsible for the creation of domesticated creatures, so allowing them all to die - even by natural causes - would be to neglect that unique duty.

Moreover, because there is a difference, Korsgaard argues, between "substituting one state of affairs for another, and creating a state of affairs from scratch" (10.4.4) it is impossible to do *anything* to a population of living creatures simply 'for the sake of' some hypothetical future set of creatures. Calling this a problem of 'gentrification,' Korsgaard raises the worry that benefits experienced by the creatures of tomorrow cannot justify the mistreatment of creatures today - especially when those two sets of creatures are populated by entirely different individuals (10.4.5). Such gentrification, though justifiable on consequentialist grounds, fails to treat the creatures who are currently alive as respectable ends-in-themselves.

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But perhaps the single largest surprise in this thought-provoking book comes in the final chapter when Korsgaard bluntly denies Kant's famous dictum that "ought implies can" (12.1.3). Because she assigns Kant's optimism about the potential instantiation of the Kingdom of Ends on Earth to his theology (6.5.2), Korsgaard believes that, in the absence of that theology, there is simply no reason to think that "there must be some guarantee that morality and nature are going to fit together somehow" (12.1.3). Instead, Korsgaard treats the products of deductive ethical reasoning more like pragmatic tools than divine laws and draws a distinction between two ways of reading Kant's dictum: the connection between blameworthiness and agency ("can't, therefore not-blameworthy" perhaps) is altogether different from a positive obligation in itself ("can, therefore should"). These two distinct variations of "ought implies can" are not clearly delineated and too quickly passed over in this text - hopefully, Korsgaard and others will continue to unravel the thread of this tantalizing dichotomy in future work.

There is much to be commended in *Fellow Creatures*, both in what I have summarized, as well as what I have had to neglect; Korsgaard addresses, for example, more complicated notions of desert (6.5), general criticisms of utilitarianism (9), the improper prioritization of type-Creatures over token individuals (11.6), the morality of human extinction (11.9), and other fascinating topics which each deserve their own monograph. In so doing, and by presenting her notions of 'tetheredness' and the incorporation of quasi-teleological goodness into a deontological framework, Korsgaard has charted many potential courses for the next generation of Kantian moral theorists as they continue to explore how "morality is just the human way of being an animal" (8.6.1).