

BETWEEN THE SPECIES

Human Identity, Animal Identity, and Reflective Endorsement

ABSTRACT

In this paper, I will argue that philosophers have overestimated the value of reflective endorsement. Introspection does not, as many philosophers have supposed, shine a searchlight on a person's authentic identity. Our "selves" are not as transparent to us as we would like to think. I will argue that if this is the case, the outputs of the reflective endorsement process are not inherently normative in the way that thinkers like Harry Frankfurt and Christine Korsgaard have suggested. If this is the case, then the identities that we establish through the process of reflective endorsement are not the moral features of our experience that we might have supposed. And if this is the case, then we would be wrong to place other-than-human animals in a different moral category than humans simply because they do not regularly engage in reflective endorsement. I will argue that we learn more about our authentic selves by monitoring our consistent, reliable dispositions to behave. If this is the case, there would no longer be any justification for denying that other-than-human animals have coherent identities through time, since they too demonstrate reliable and predictable behavioral dispositions.

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In Plato's dialogues, much is made of the Delphic maxim "Know Thyself." In contemporary individualist cultures, knowing oneself has become a significant profit industry. A person who wants to know more about why they behave in the way that they do might pay for psychotherapy. A quick library database search reveals a seemingly endless list of self-help books that claim to help the potential reader to "discover" or to "rediscover" herself.

Indeed, for many, knowledge of the self seems to be an important component for living a meaningful life. One's sense of self is important for one's self esteem. It often involves identification with a set of values and principles that one finds important. In recent years, a number of philosophical writers have cast the self, discovered upon introspection, in critical roles in their philosophical theories. For example, Christine Korsgaard views the ways in which we identify as the source of the binding nature of our reasons, both moral and practical (Korsgaard 1996). Harry Frankfurt attaches our sense of identity to what we care about and to what it is to be a person (Frankfurt 2004).

Much discussion of the value of understanding the self puts significant emphasis on what a person finds upon introspection—one identifies with one's own values through a process of reflective endorsement. There may be some value in this internal process. On the other hand, if we identify this way of knowing oneself with what it is to be a person, what it is for things to be valuable, and what it is that makes a thing a *reason* for a being, it might be easy to conclude that beings that don't have the capacities that humans do for introspection do not live valuable, meaningful lives.

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In this paper, I will argue that, though there is some philosophical value in introspection, it is not as useful as we tend to think. I will argue that we are not as transparent to ourselves as we imagine, and that much of what we find upon introspection is really just confabulation. I will contend further that a more authentic picture of the self should focus not on what one finds upon introspection, but on dispositions to behave. Though some non-human animals may not have the capacity for introspection that humans do, they certainly do have behavioral dispositions.

Reflective Endorsement, Human Identity, and Human Reasons

As Peter Singer points out in *Animal Liberation*, philosophers often provide solutions to philosophical problems that attempt to solve those problems *as human beings encounter them* (Singer 1975). The necessary and sufficient conditions for many philosophical concepts tend to be drawn up in ways that render facts about non-human animals and the experiences of such animals irrelevant to the conversation.¹ Singer points out that this description has historically been accurate when it comes to philosophical discussion of the problem of inequality. I contend that we also lack justification for leaving facts about non-human animals out of the conversation when it comes to many other philosophical concepts. Most relevant to the discussion here will be philosophical concepts such as knowledge, reasons for action, personhood, and the self. I'll provide two examples of contemporary philosophical frameworks that encourage us (intentionally or not) to think about important philosophical questions from a decidedly human lens.

¹I'm thinking, for example, of the distinction between animal and reflective knowledge in Ernest Sosa's *A Virtue Epistemology*. (Sosa 2007)

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Before I do so, however, I want to quickly sketch a fairly common picture of the behavior of persons. Consider the activity of Jane. Throughout her life, Jane forms beliefs on the basis of quality evidence. She is able to do this because she has given careful thought to the question of exactly what counts as evidence and has made a conscious effort to make sure that her beliefs are evidence responsive. Jane has established a set of values. Those values do much work in defining who she is as a person. When she encounters a moral dilemma, she does her best to make sure that her actions are consistent with her values. In this way, Jane endeavors to follow the maxim “Know Thyself” and to live an examined life. Notice that throughout, Jane repeatedly consults her own mental states and takes attitudes toward her own thoughts. Let’s keep Jane in mind throughout the discussion here.

Turning to contemporary philosophy, let’s look first to the work of Christine Korsgaard. In *The Sources of Normativity*, Korsgaard attempts to answer what she calls The Normative Question. For any normative claim ever made, for any justification for action ever offered, it is always possible to ask, “Why should I care about *that*?” When I make a practical decision, The Normative Question arises. I might decide to spend my free time learning a new language so that I can understand more about people and the world. But it’s always possible for me to ask myself, “Why should I care about *that*?” When I make an ethical decision, The Normative Question again arises. I might decide to donate money to educate women and girls in developing nations. Again, I can always ask myself, “Why should I care about *that*?” The Normative Question concerns the fundamental justification for normativity, both moral and practical. It arises for human beings because we are reflective creatures—we are creatures capable of asking “why?” On

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Korsgaard's view, if we can identify some reply about which it would be incoherent to raise this question, we have found a satisfactory answer to the Normative Problem.

It is important to note here that in many ways a search for a solution to The Normative Problem is an attempt to avoid nihilism or meaninglessness. If we can't fundamentally justify the things that we care about, maybe they don't matter after all. In the case of morality, we might be left with moral skepticism or even moral nihilism. We're looking for a solution that somehow justifies our goals and projects. We'll see however, that the question is posed for rational creatures, and the answer offered by Korsgaard is an answer that, if successful, provides *humans* (or other rational creatures) with normatively grounded reasons for action.

Taking an attitude toward one's own mental states is key to answering The Normative Question for Korsgaard. Specifically, she focuses on what we'll call *reflective endorsement*. Reflective endorsement involves (1) introspection, and (2), taking an evaluative position toward the inner states upon which one introspects. Endorsement in particular involves affirmation of and identification with what one finds upon introspection.

Korsgaard identifies the correct deliberative procedure for action in terms of conforming to what she calls our "practical identities." One's practical identity is "a description under which you value yourself, a description under which you find your life to be worth living and your actions to be worth undertaking" (Korsgaard 1996, 101). To act in accordance with a practical identity is to reflectively endorse reasons for action based upon some specific conception of ourselves. Most of these identities are contingent. For example, a person might

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conceive of herself as a mother, a daughter, a member of a profession, or a citizen of a state. Some identities are more central to our lives than others. The demands these practical identities make on us take priority over others that are less fundamental to who we are. All of our practical identities serve to ground normative claims. As Korsgaard argues, “Your reasons for acting express your identity, your nature; your obligations spring from what that identity forbids” (Korsgaard 1996, 101).

For Korsgaard, however, we have one practical identity that is not contingent, namely, our ‘humanity’. Humanity is, as she defines it, our “identity simply as *a human being*, a reflective animal who needs reasons to act and to live” (Korsgaard 1996, 121). As she later explains, we are ‘human beings’ insofar as we “need to have practical conceptions of [our] identity in order to act or to live,” where this most fundamental identity “stands behind” all the other particular identities we might have (Korsgaard 1996, 129). Because of its special status, Korsgaard concludes that we must value our own humanity—as well as the humanity of everybody else—unconditionally. This gives rise to moral obligations. It means that I, as a rational creature have obligations to you, as another rational creature. In light of our shared status as rational creatures, you have obligations to me as well.

Practical Identities and Non-Human Animals

Where does this leave non-human animals? We are left with the conclusion that non-human animals don’t act on the basis of reasons, or, at the very least, not on reasons that are genuinely normatively binding for them. If non-human animals aren’t capable of endorsing identities as, for example, parents or members of communities, there is no genuinely normative reason for them to act as those roles dictate. In this way, on Korsgaard’s

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view, animals seem to be different from human beings, not just in degree, but in kind. Humans are the kinds of things that act for reasons and non-human animals are not.

I want to explore the plausibility of the idea that what it is to take on a practical identity is to reflectively endorse a certain conception of oneself. Consider the following example. Mark thinks of himself as a writer. All of his life, he has found the aesthetic of being a writer very attractive. He envisions himself someday hiding away in a cabin in the mountains, putting the finishing touches on his novel like a character in a Stephen King story. Mark has read books written by successful authors providing tips and tricks of the craft. All the same, Mark hasn't put a word down on paper since college—he never *writes* anything. Imagine further that when Mark has free time, he engages in woodworking. At first, he just poked at it, his wife wanted a new shelf for the living room, and he thought they'd save money if he made it himself. As time progressed however, Mark increasingly spent more and more of his time on the weekends in his garage at his workbench. When Mark reflects on himself, when he attempts to know himself, he endorses a conception of himself according to which he is a writer. The idea that he is a woodworker never occurs to him. Which, if either of these activities should we think of as one of Mark's "practical identities"?

It may be that "practical identity" is a technical term; by stipulation it refers to the conception of oneself that one endorses upon reflection. If that is the case, it remains to be seen whether these ways of conceiving of oneself are valuable. After all, what does Mark gain by deluding himself into thinking that he is a writer? What is philosophically interesting about this identity constructed out of a misrepresentation of the facts? If,

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on the other hand, *practical* identities could be better understood as being revealed by what we *do*, then perhaps non-human animals have practical identities after all—identities that give them genuinely normative reasons for action.

Non-human animals can and do take on roles in their communities, even if they cannot endorse those roles through a process of introspection on their values. Many animals are very social and being social involves standing in certain kinds of relations to others and serving certain kinds of functions. Consider the case of elephants. Elephants are very social beings that live their lives in complex communities. The matriarchs of elephant families are treated as leaders, though whether they are followed or not might depend on factors like personality and vitality. Elephants engage in cooperative behavior. Doing so requires each elephant to understand their respective role, even if they can't articulate that role or endorse it from a second order perspective. One way of thinking about practical identities is in terms of the set of things a being reliably and consistently *does* rather than how that being is inclined to identify. If this is the case, then at least certain animals take on identities that correspond to the roles that they play in their communities.

In the case of Mark the would-be writer (or Mark the covert woodworker), I've described a person who isn't entirely transparent to himself upon introspection. Knowing oneself can be tricky. There are other cases of bungled introspection that might be greater causes for concern. These involve instances of Sartrean "bad faith." Consider the case of Janet. Over the years working her way up the corporate ladder, Janet has become a vicious businesswoman. She's quick to take advantage of any opportunity, even if (and, perhaps, *especially* if) doing so would put someone else at a significant disadvantage.

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When Janet introspects, she sees those tendencies there, they are transparent to her. Nevertheless, such motivations strike her as alien impulses. She does not endorse them, she does not view them as arising from her enduring character. They disgust her. Instead, when she introspects, she endorses a conception of herself according to which she is deeply committed to loving her neighbor as herself. If she ever acts ruthlessly, it is not really *her*, she is succumbing to alien impulses that don't reflect her true character. And she succumbs *all the time*. Janet is either lying to herself, cherry picking, or both. In theory, it is possible for *every* identity that a person endorses upon introspection to be formed in bad faith in this way. It may be that these fabricated identities based on wishful thinking about one's true nature provide agents with normatively grounded reasons for action. They have reasons to do what their idealized picture of themselves would do. This leaves the motivation for what they *actually do* utterly mysterious.

Human beings can weave narratives about their own lives. They can tell themselves stories about who they are. This is an interesting fact about human beings. It has the potential to be profoundly beautiful, deeply disturbing, and maybe a little of both. However, this fact about human beings does *not* entail that human beings are different in kind from non-human animals or that human reasons are fundamentally different from the reasons that motivate animals.

I've argued that it is possible for people to reflectively endorse conceptions of themselves in ways that either involve self-deception or failing to see oneself clearly. So far, I have only demonstrated that this is *possible*, I haven't established that it is *likely*. In the final section of this paper, I'll provide some reasons for thinking that human beings frequently en-

dorse conceptions of themselves in ways that are less than ideal from a philosophical standpoint. Before I do that, however, I want to discuss a related view offered by Harry Frankfurt.

Frankfurt on Human Caring and Love

Harry Frankfurt uses the concept of reflective endorsement in his account of what it is to be a person and his account of personhood is directly related to his compatibilist view of free will. He notes that human beings are capable of having both first and second order beliefs and desires. For example, a being may have a first order desire to smoke a cigarette. In many cases, a being's second order desire may not ever be operative—that being might, on most occasions, smoke a cigarette because they have a first order desire to smoke the cigarette. On other occasions, however, a being might have second order beliefs and desires *about* their first order desires. For example, a being could have the following meta belief-desire pair, "I am perfectly comfortable with my desire to smoke a cigarette, and I want that desire to continue to be operative." In this case, the being will continue to smoke the cigarette. A being may also have a second order belief-desire pair that conflicts with the first order desire. For instance, the being might have the second order belief-desire pair that can be expressed as a belief that smoking is dangerous paired with a desire to stop smoking. In those cases in which the first order desire overwhelms the second order desire (in this case, when the being smokes the cigarette even when they don't want to), the being exhibits weakness of will. When the second order desire (sometimes in this case referred to as a second order volition) steers the ship and motivates the being to do its bidding, the being involved exhibits both free will and personhood. The ability to guide one's first order desires through the use of one's second order desires is what makes a being a free person.

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The formulation of second order volitions requires introspection. In order to act, we must take our goals and projects seriously. We must take ourselves seriously. Frankfurt says,

Taking ourselves seriously means that we are not prepared to accept ourselves just as we come. We want our thoughts, our feelings, our choices, and our behavior to make sense. We are not satisfied to think that our ideas are formed haphazardly, or that our actions are driven by transient and opaque impulses or by mindless decisions. We need to direct ourselves—or at any rate to believe that we are directing ourselves—in thoughtful conformity to stable and appropriate norms. We want to get things right (Frankfurt 2006).

To determine whether we are getting things right will involve identification with our own beliefs and desires. When we consider whether we ought to perform an action, we have to test the commitments that action entails against other things that we care about. This involves taking an evaluative stance toward our attitudes. In making this point, Frankfurt identifies what he takes to be a unique quality of members of our species. He says,

We are unique (probably) in being able simultaneously to be engaged in whatever is going on in our conscious minds, to detach ourselves from it, and to observe it—as it were—from a distance. We are then in a position to form reflexive or higher order responses to it. For instance, we may approve of what we notice ourselves feeling, or we may disapprove; we may want to remain the sort of person we observe ourselves to be, or we may want to be different” (Frankfurt 2006).

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How do we determine what kind of person we want to be? It depends on what we care about. Care and love are critical to Frankfurt's position—he takes them to be key to motivation. What is it to care? Frankfurt emphasizes that there is a difference between merely wanting or desiring a thing and caring about that thing. An addict may want a drug, but it does not follow that he or she *cares* about the drug (though, of course, some addicts might). Caring about things is a matter of endorsing or identifying with them and is a position that we arrive at through introspection and reflection. Caring also has a temporal component. He says, “when we do care about something, we go beyond wanting it. We want to *go on* wanting it, at least until the goal has been reached. Thus, we feel it as a lapse on our part if we neglect the desire, and we are disposed to take steps to refresh the desire if it should tend to fade” (Frankfurt 2006). The caring entails, in other words, an ongoing commitment to the object of care. He says, “By our caring, we maintain various thematic continuities in our volitions” (Frankfurt 2006). Though all instances of caring involve second order volitions, the converse is not true. Not all second order volitions represent instances of caring because of the temporal component involved in caring. He says, “Caring about something implies a diachronic coherence, which integrates itself throughout time.” I'll call this general requirement Frankfurt's *Re-affirmational Requirement for Caring*.

Re-Affirmational Requirement for Caring: If we care about something, we are “disposed [through time] to take steps to refresh the desire should it tend to fade.”

Frankfurt also identifies a third category of evaluative attitude—there are some things that we come to love. When we love things, we often have very little, or no control at all, over

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whether we love them. The things that we love and that we can't help but to care about are what Frankfurt calls "volitional necessities." He says, "The objects of our love represent our most fundamental commitments and provide us with overriding reasons for action. When we love something, we see it as having value in itself, and we see the interests of the thing or the person that we love as worthy of pursuit for their own sake" (Frankfurt 2006, 229).

Like Korsgaard, Frankfurt identifies the source of our most compelling set of obligations as the set of things that we would die rather than to give up. For him, these things are volitional necessities. The things that we love provide us with our most compelling reasons for action, followed by the reasons that are provided by the things that we care about. Like Korsgaard, then, Frankfurt thinks that what explains the value of the things that we care about is the very fact that *we value them*, where valuing is a process that requires introspection.

Love, Care, and Non-Human Animals

Unless we want to deny the available behavioral evidence, we ought to believe that non-human animals experience and engage in both love and care. When the mother of a non-human animal protects and provides for her young even when doing so puts her to great hardship or even risks her life, it appears that she does so because she cares about her young. Indeed, it is hard to imagine what evidence to the contrary could even look like. After all, the best evidence we can attain for the conclusion that one *human being* cares for another is the way they treat that other. There is really nothing left to check.

If we accept Frankfurt's view, however, we are again left with the conclusion that *human* love and *human* care differ from love

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and care experienced and practiced by non-human animals not just in degree but in kind. Human care requires the capacity to introspect—to take attitudes toward one’s own thoughts. Since at least some non-human animals can’t introspect, love and care are totally different kinds of phenomena for them. Given that all beings evolved under similar conditions, the idea that these very similar behaviors are, at their core, fundamentally different strikes me as a claim that is implausible on its face. Setting that concern aside, I’ll raise some objections to Frankfurt’s account of caring. Throughout, I will again suggest that caring might be better understood as a disposition to behave rather than as an introspective activity.

Frankfurt’s re-affirmational account of caring requires a being to understand itself as persisting through time. That being must care, and they must *want to want* to go on caring. This leaves many non-human animals out of the caring business, at least when it comes to caring of this form. I’ll argue that this is an implausible requirement in the case of human beings as well. One reason it is implausible is because it assumes that a person is always aware of what they care about. Consider Jane Austin’s *Emma*. It is clear to all readers from the very outset of the novel that Emma cares for Mr. Knightly. Emma herself professes her intentions to never marry and she seems to be oblivious to her own affections. Nevertheless, all of her actions throughout the novel support the idea that she cares for Mr. Knightly and at the end of the novel the surprise ending is a surprise only to Emma herself! There are, of course, non-fictional examples of this kind of phenomenon. Children may claim to care little for what their parents think of them, yet spend their entire lives seeking the approval of those very parents. They may be genuinely unaware that they care or of the extent to which they care.

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Frankfurt's account also suggests that caring is not caring unless it persists through time and is introspectively re-affirmed repeatedly. Metaphysically, that requirement seems to transform all short-term cares into mere "wants." I think this is implausible. Consider the following case. A set of expecting parents eagerly awaits the birth of their first child. The pregnancy goes well, and there is no reason to believe anything is amiss. When the child is delivered, it is clear that something is horribly wrong. For seconds, the parents care desperately about the health of the child—they care more than anything else in the world about the continued life of their baby. Within moments, it is clear that the care, at least in that particular form, no longer makes sense. The child is dead. The parents can't carry forth that particular care into the future, they can't reflectively re-affirm it. Yet it seems that the phenomenon of care was instantiated in the intensity of that particular emotion in that particular moment.

If the two examples I have provided are effective, they show that we ought to be reluctant to accept Frankfurt's account of care. If Frankfurt has shown anything, he has shown that the act of re-affirmational caring through introspection may be sufficient for caring but is not necessary. If this is the case, humans and non-human animals often, perhaps even most of the time, care in the same ways.

We recognize care behavior when we see it. When a teacher dedicates long hours to help a struggling student, we recognize care, even if the teacher never affirms the attitude or tells us how she feels. When an adult child diligently sees to the needs of their aging and infirm parent, we recognize care. When members of animal social groups go out of the way to be there for one another, we recognize care. In *Ethics and Animals*, Lori

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Gruen describes a relationship between two elephants, Shirley and Jenny, who were held together under tragic confinement conditions at a circus (Gruen 2011). Early in their lives, they were separated. They were reunited in later life at an elephant sanctuary, and immediately bonded to one another, demonstrating strong signs that they remembered one another. Gruen describes the end of Jenny's life in the following way,

Shirley and Jenny, though separated for twenty years, were now inseparable at the sanctuary, even through Jenny's very last days. Jenny, though much younger than Shirley, came to the sanctuary in 1996 in very ill health. Jenny recovered enough to enjoy each day of her remaining ten years at the sanctuary, but the physical toll of her early life was inescapable. During the last week of Jenny's life, in October of 2006, Shirley was at her side, helping her to get up when she could. When it was clear that Jenny's life was coming to an end, Shirley walked off into the woods and stayed there. She didn't eat for two days. Shirley had bonded with other elephants, and they helped her heal (Gruen 2011, 131).

Shirley may not be able to take attitudes toward her own mental states. She does not consciously re-affirm her commitment to Jenny's well-being to see to it that the care continues to thrive. Nevertheless, one of her identities is *friend* to Jenny, and she demonstrates her care and commitment through her reliable dispositions to behave in caring ways.

Reflective Endorsement and "Knowing Oneself"

Earlier I asked you to keep in mind an agent, Jane, who always forms beliefs on the basis of the best available evidence, and who

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consistently introspectively keeps her beliefs and values in alignment. People like Jane do not exist. Jane is an idealized version of a human person. This matters when we are thinking about the differences between human animals and non-human animals. For reflective endorsement to play the kind of role in philosophical theories that Korsgaard and Frankfurt have in mind, it must be the case that agents engage in the reflective process in good faith. There is something very appealing about Jane. She is living the examined life. We like to imagine that all people are or can be like Jane. In what follows I will provide some research in empirical social psychology that suggests that reflective endorsement has some value, but not the value captured by our description of Jane. We tend to reflect and endorse in ways that keep us psychologically healthy, even if those endorsements don't match the facts. Reflective endorsement may be good for mental health but bad for authenticity. I'll provide two general types of examples below.

The Self-Serving Bias

Studies support the conclusion that we are motivated to both attain and to maintain a positive sense of self. The process of reflective endorsement can help us to develop a positive conception of ourselves that is psychologically healthy.

It is a truism that most people are average. After all, that's what it is to be average. Despite the obvious truth of this description, however, most people believe of themselves that they are above average. In a paper on the topic, Alicke and Govorun highlight the results of a well-documented case of the phenomenon:

Data collected in conjunction with the 1976 College Board Exams provide one of the earliest, most strik-

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ing, and most frequently cited demonstrations of the better-than-average effect. Of the approximately one million students who took the SAT that year, 70% placed themselves above the median in leadership ability, 60% above the median in athletic ability, and 85% rated themselves above the median in their ability to get along well with others (Alicke and Govorun 2005).

It is obvious that many of the participants were wrong about how they compared to the average with respect to each of these characteristics. What this study and many others like it highlight is that we have a psychological need to think highly of our good traits—in many cases, more highly than appraisal of our traits honestly deserves. It seems that we do this, in part, because thinking highly of ourselves is an important part of psychological health.

Importantly for our purposes here, people also have a tendency to view themselves as better moral agents than their peers. Codol asked study participants to assess how often they conformed to socially desirable norms (Codol 1975). Most participants indicated that they conformed to such norms more often than average.

As a result of the better-than-average phenomenon, or our self-serving bias, we are inclined to view ourselves in more favorable ways than might actually be warranted by the best available evidence. Viewing ourselves in the best possible light, or, at least, in a better-than average light, contributes to psychological health. Reflective endorsement can, and probably often does, contribute to this conception of ourselves. We introspect, we consider ourselves and our traits, and we employ a heuristic that emphasizes the positive.

Self-Verification

Reflective endorsement can also be psychologically healthy in another way—to satisfy a need we have to verify those components of the self that we already take ourselves to have. Some social scientists have suggested that, in addition to satisfying a need for predictability and control, our impulse to self-verify also satisfies a psychological need that we have to have “consistent and balanced cognitions” (Moskowitz 2005). Too much change is unsettling to us. Therefore, in addition to attempting to maintain a positive view of ourselves, we also try to maintain a stable one.

In support of the claim that human beings have a tendency toward self-verification that is distinct from their tendency toward self-serving affirmations, studies have been conducted that indicate that human beings prefer to be judged negatively with respect to those features of their lives or behavior that they already view as being deficient. In one such study, participants were asked to describe their worst feature (e.g., their weight) (Jr. 1990). Other participants were then brought in to comment on that feature. Some of these participants said something positive about the feature and others said something negative about the feature. The original participants were then asked which of the two assessors they would like to participate with in a later stage of the experiment, and people chose the assessor who agreed with their assessment of their negative feature rather than the one who disagreed with it. It may be, then, that, to achieve a sense of consistency, we accept evidence from others that supports the ways in which we already want to view ourselves, and that we reject disconfirming evidence.

The process of reflection on one’s own attributes followed by disavowing one or more of them is a paradigm case of en-

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gaging in a reflective endorsement process (or, in this case, an instance of reflective disavowal). These studies suggest that we like confirmation of the ways in which we are already inclined to view ourselves.

Reflective endorsement is a useful mechanism for achieving mental health and stability. To that extent, it is valuable. That said, these examples undercut the idea that endorsement is a way of constructing normatively binding reasons for action and undermine the idea that introspection reveals to us what we really care about. It seems that one of the main functions of reflective endorsement is to prevent us from plunging into existential crisis caused by psychologically distressing or disorienting discoveries about ourselves.

Conclusion

According to many philosophers, the ability to reflect on one's own inner states and to take an evaluative attitude toward what one finds is an ability that sets human beings apart from non-human animals. In this paper, I have argued that endorsement does not serve the philosophical functions often attributed to it. If this is correct, then species membership may make little difference when it comes to motivation, reasons, caring, and love. People reveal who they are and what they care about through their reliable behavior. In this way, we are not different in kind from non-human animals who also demonstrate commitment and care through their dispositions to behave in caring ways.

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