Book Reviews

On Animals, Volume Two: Theological Ethics

DL Clough (2019). Published by T & T Clark, Bloomsbury Publishing, 50 Bedford Square, London WC1B 3DP, UK. 299 pages Hardback (ISBN: 978-0-5676-6086-2), Paperback (ISBN: 978-05676-8952-8). Price £100.00 (Hardback), £28.99 (Paperback).

Most of the moral thinking about animal welfare in recent times has been conducted by moral philosophers and animal welfare activists. Christian theologians by contrast have, with some exceptions, been much less evident in the public debate. This has now changed with the publication of David Clough's *On Animals*, which is without doubt the finest and most extensively and comprehensively argued work on the theological ethics of animals produced by a Christian ethicist to date.

The present book is the second of two volumes, the first (*On Animals, Volume One: Systematic Theology*) laying out the theological vision of the place of animals in creation that informs his ethical analysis. There, against the dominant traditional Christian understanding that non-human animals are ordered to the flourishing of human beings, Clough argued that the rest of creation is not simply scenery, its meaning exhausted in its usefulness for human purposes. Rather, it matters in its own right: thus, non-human animals have their own independent relationship with God (as shown in the covenant with all living creatures in Genesis 9.8-17), and are called to worship and participate in the life of God in their own way. This recognition that all animals, human and non-human alike, are equal before God and equally share creaturely lives of vulnerability and dependence does not, however, imply at the opposite extreme that all animals are morally indistinguishable, such that it is a matter of indifference whether to save an ailing human infant or the tick on its skin when it is not possible to do both. That kind of homogenisation neglects the differentiation that is inherent in creation, animals being made each according to their kind (Genesis 1.20-25). We need to recognise what might be called the appropriate dignity of all animals, according to which each animal has its unique form of flourishing related to its own characteristic mode of life. This unique form of flourishing also applies to human beings, whose being made in the image of God refers not to some special faculty that renders them categorically superior to the rest of creation, but rather to the uniqueness of the way in which they are called by God to care for creation.

What does this mean for the ethical questions of relating to non-human animals explored in the second volume? One way of reading Clough's work is as an exceptionally interesting case study in some of the ways Christian theology can make a difference to thinking about moral concerns. He starts with a scene from Michael Morpurgo's First World War story, *War Horse*, in which a soldier attending to an injured horse discovered in no man's land is reprimanded by an officer who is understandably more anxious about the suffering of other soldiers. However, in the context of the narrative, it is clear that tending the wounded animal is the right thing to do: at *this* time, in *these* circumstances, that is precisely what is morally demanded. But how to make sense of this? Clough turns to the parable of the Good Samaritan and the attitudes and practices of neighbourliness: the first question is not philosophical, whether the one I encounter is a 'person' or satisfies any general criteria about moral standing I may lay down; rather it is existential, whether I am prepared to be a neighbour to them. Before we theorise, the non-human animal in need is our neighbour, and our practical willingness to respond in love sets the framework of intelligibility for any subsequent reflection or more abstract discussion.

This emphasis on the priority of neighbourliness does not answer all ethical issues of animal welfare, of course. But it already suggests some basic orientations. For example, it immediately puts in question the claim — made variously by Aquinas, Hume, Kant, and Rawls — that we do not have direct duties to other animals, but only indirect duties in respect of them; that is, that we only have duties towards non-human animals because the way we behave towards them is liable to affect the way we behave towards human beings. Morpurgo's soldier was right to tend to the horse, not because it would make him more caring of his fellow soldiers, but because the horse had a claim on him. And, theologically, this makes sense because God's care for the well-being of other animals is independent of any value they may have for human beings.

However, Clough argues that this also raises questions for the major philosophical direct-duty accounts. Peter Singer's preference-utilitarianism maintains that the suffering of sentient beings should be regarded equally irrespective of species, and that satisfaction of a creature's future preferences should be given value. But, while utilitarianism has rightly drawn attention to the moral significance of animal suffering, Singer's framework is unable to recognise that a creature which is incapable of grasping that it is a being with a future may nevertheless be wronged: a day-old male chick may not know that it is a being with a future, but it is still wronged by being tossed live into a mincing machine. Rights-based accounts, such as that of Tom Regan, argue that animals which have sensory, cognitive and other capacities at certain levels should be regarded as being subjects of a life. These are superior to utilitarian approaches in their appreciation that cruelty towards such animals is not only a failure of charity or of compassion for their suffering, but rather a matter of injustice and violation of their inherent dignity. Yet, like all threshold-based analyses, they erect a fundamentally arbitrary boundary between those animals which are owed respect, and others — say, the same animals but slightly younger — which receive at best mere charity. Virtue ethics (he singles out Rosalind Hursthouse) has done better than either utilitarianism or rights theory in drawing attention to the centrality of the moral agent in ethics, but is weaker than either in its failure to recognise that the demand on an agent from outside made by another is not reducible to an analysis of the agent's virtues: the virtues do not substitute for the claim of the other, we might say, but are

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what enable us to attend without distraction to it. The feminist ethic of care, in the version developed by Josephine Donovan and Carol Adams, is particularised and flexible in its sympathetic responsiveness to non-human animals, and can be worked up to avoid the criticism that it is liable to favour 'charismatic furry animals such as giant pandas'; but it still does not entirely convincingly provide the kind of protection that others have sought to secure through a certain kind of universality of moral judgement. Finally, Martha Nussbaum's capabilities approach, which extends her multi-dimensional analysis of human flourishing to other animal species, provides for a greater complexity to animal flourishing than allowed for by utilitarian or rights-based theories and yet also justifies an equal dignity between human beings and animals. Nevertheless, Clough faults her for recommending merely incremental reform; in order to obtain an overlapping consensus in favour of humane treatment of animals, as well as to preclude possible conflicts with respect for human capabilities, she soft-pedals the need for more radical change.

Even if none of these direct-duty approaches is wholly satisfactory, each of them gets something right according to Clough's generously pluralist analysis: whether it is the moral significance of suffering, the duty to justice owed to non-human animals, the character of the moral agent, or the sympathetic hearing of the voice of the non-human animal. He accepts that his own views are closest to those of Nussbaum, starting with a wonder at living things and responding with a desire to ensure their integral good. In other words, the neighbourly desire to attend to the claim of the other, given in the story of the Good Samaritan, needs to be complemented by an understanding of the differentiated nature of their flourishing.

It is this attentiveness to creaturely flourishing that constitutes the moral core of the book. This is worked out in chapters devoted to using other animals for food; for clothing and textiles; for labour; for research, medicine and education; for sport and entertainment; as companions and pets; and in contexts where they are not domesticated. In each case, Clough spells out in detail how current treatment of non-human animals frequently falls obscenely short of even the most minimal standards of care for their good. Many of the pitiful details of human maltreatment of animals will be familiar to readers of this journal, one would expect, but this does not make them easier to bear. Clough writes with a sustained sense of moral outrage: witnessing pigs scream and run in panic as they try to escape the electric tongs of an abattoir worker, he notes, "I felt that I had witnessed an atrocity", made all the more terrible by the calm composure of the vet filling out the routine paperwork next door. Yet, true to his commitment to the flourishing of all creatures, he is not concerned only for cognitively more complex adult animals, or emotionally more appealing baby ones: silk moth larvae, he argues, are different in morally relevant ways from mammals or reptiles that are also killed to make clothes from their wool, fur or skin, but heating them to death in order to avoid damage to their silk similarly prevents their growth and flourishing as creatures that are equally called to glorify God in their own order of being.

The descriptive and moral detail is extraordinarily well done, simultaneously moving and judicious, and it repays careful attention. One line of thought I would like to see explored further is how his theological ethical approach differs in principle from the capabilities approach, to which he finds himself closest because of their shared attention to creaturely flourishing. Clearly, one decisive difference lies in the doctrinal affirmations which constitute his work as theological: non-human animals have moral standing because they have been created in the divine joy, participate in the reconciliation of all things to God made possible in Christ, and will share in the universal vision of peaceful, non-predatory harmony in the presence of God. Such affirmations make clear that the difference that Christian theology makes to ethics is not a matter of adding arbitrary divine *fiat* to otherwise inscrutable moral commands, as is sometimes supposed, but of showing how everything that exists exists in order to find its characteristic form of flourishing fulfilled in God.

Yet within that horizon, when one considers the moral implications of attending to creaturely flourishing, the differences are less apparent. The first criticism Clough makes of Nussbaum seems adventitious: her desire to work for an overlapping consensus as the way forward seems closer to a prudential difference of tactics rather than anything more fundamental. And his second concern, about her desire to avoid conflict between respect for animal capabilities and respect for human capabilities, arguably works in her favour: at least she foregrounds the possibility of incompatibility, whereas Clough tends to be a little coy. He rightly repeats that irreconcilable conflicts are much rarer than we think: almost never, for example, are rich Westerners faced with situations where they are unable to substitute plant-based for animal-based protein. But, exceptional as they may be, where there is such a conflict between human beings and animals, it is hard to imagine him favouring a non-human over a human animal. However, to justify this it is inadequate simply to point to the unique vocation of human beings, since every kind of animal has its own unique vocation and specific form of flourishing, and to privilege any animal over any other solely on these grounds seems arbitrary. Somehow, we need to find a way of articulating human difference which doesn't licence human exceptionalism or exploitative relations to animals yet is willing to risk asking what is characteristically human. Being a 'rational' animal, for example, may be a way not of escaping animality but of expressing the peculiarly human form of it, a form which may in turn dimly point to possible resolutions of such conflicts. Clough is understandably wary of the kind of metaphysical investigation this would involve, seeing it as liable to be a disastrously self-serving diversion when our practice is so awry. Yet sooner or later we will need to ponder what it means that Adam names the animals, and not the other way round — even if we may only do so after we have first heard and begun to act on what Clough has to tell us.

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