Korsgaard, Christine M. Fellow Creatures: Our Obligations to the other Animals.

Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018. Pp. 272. $24.95 (hardcover)

Christine Korsgaard is one of the most important moral philosophers working today. Over the past several decades, she has gradually constructed a powerful theory of the self, the good, and the right to show that if you value anything at all, then you must value all rational beings as ends. In this eagerly awaited book, she expands this theory by arguing that if you value anything at all, then you must value all sentient beings as ends too. She then examines the implications of this argument for a wide range of issues in animal and environmental ethics.

This is an incredibly important work. Despite an emerging consensus that sentient beings have moral standing, many philosophers still assume that Kantianism is incompatible with this position. So, for a scholar such as Korsgaard to argue that Kantianism entails this position is a major moment in the history of moral philosophy. Not only will it disrupt standard narratives about moral theories, but it will also further shift the burden onto people who continue to deny that animals have moral standing.

This is also an incredibly impressive work. Few philosophers are able to discuss metaethics, normative ethics, applied ethics, and history of philosophy as holistically as Korsgaard. In this book she starts with a procedural theory of rationality and ends with a substantive theory of universal rights for all sentient beings. Whether or not you agree with all of her arguments (I agree with some and not with others), this is a remarkably ambitious project, and her development of this project both merits and rewards careful study.

The book is structured in three parts. In Part 1 (ch.1-4), Korsgaard develops a theory of the good that she draws from Aristotle. In Part 2 (ch.5-8) she develops a theory of the right that she draws from Kant. In part 3 (ch.9-12) she examines the implications of her theory for our treatment of animals in a variety of contexts. In what follows I will offer a short summary of each chapter. I will then close with some questions and comments that I hope will be useful for framing further discussion.

Korsgaard starts in Chapter 1 by arguing that goodness and badness are tethered, i.e. in order for something to be good or bad, it must be good or bad *to* someone or *for* someone. She then argues that, if goodness and badness are tethered, then we should reject the idea that humans are more important than other animals. After all, in order for humans to be more important than other animals, we would have to be more important than them *to everyone*. Yet

while we might be more important than them *to us*, we are not more important than them *to them*. Thus, we cannot be more important than them overall.

In Chapter 2, Korsgaard argues that while many beings have a *functional* good (i.e. a good set by an external standard), only sentient beings have a *final* good (i.e., a good set by an internal standard). This is because only sentient beings have selves, i.e., unified points of view. Rational sentient beings construct selves actively, by explicitly endorsing things that are good for them. Non-rational sentient beings construct selves passively, by implicitly endorsing things that are good for them. Either way, all and only sentient beings construct selves, with final goods, through these acts of endorsement.

In Chapter 3, Korsgaard argues that what makes rational sentient beings different from non-rational sentient beings is that we construct normative self-conceptions, i.e. conceptions of who we are and what we do that we reflectively endorse. This is what allows for science and ethics. In science, we step back from our beliefs and ask if we have reason to accept them. In ethics, we step back from our values and ask if we have reason to accept them. Korsgaard then foreshadows later arguments by claiming that when we see animals as here for us, we are failing to take this perspective. Thus, she claims, we are failing to be the kind of animal we are.

In Chapter 4, Korsgaard argues that we cannot generally compare lives across species. For example, it makes no sense to ask whether I am better than my dog Smoky, or whether I have a better life than he does. We could make these comparisons only if there was a common standard that applied to both of us. But there is not. A human life is better for me and a dog life is better for Smoky. (If Smoky changed so much that a human life became better for him, he would no longer be the same individual.) The caveat is that insofar as some things are good for both of us (e.g., food and water), we can compare our quality of life based on degree of access to those things.

In Chapter 5, Korsgaard presents a series of objections to the argument from marginal cases (AMC), which holds that there is no morally relevant property that all and only humans possess. Korsgaard replies that there is a morally relevant property that all and only humans possess: rationality. Granted, some humans might not reason as well as others, or might not reason as well at some stages of life than at others. But all humans are still rational, since rationality is still part of the human form of life. Thus, Korsgaard claims, whereas nonhumans who fail to reason well are simply "non-rational," humans who fail to reason well are "defectively rational" (84).

In Chapters 6 and 7, Korsgaard argues against the Kantian indirect duty view, according to which (a) we have a reciprocity-based duty to humans to improve our moral character, (b) we have to treat animals well to improve our moral character, and, so, (c) we have a reciprocity-based duty to humans to treat animals well.

Korsgaard replies to this argument in two main ways. First, she argues that there is a tension in the indirect duty view. If we treat animals well for our sake rather than for theirs, then we will not be treating them as ends but will rather be treating them as means. Thus, we will not be improving our moral character in the relevant sense, since improving our moral character in the relevant sense requires treating others as ends, not as means.

Second, Korsgaard argues that you can owe a reciprocity-based duty to individuals outside of the reciprocal relationship. In particular, if rational agents reciprocally agree to extend rights to non-rational beings, then they have reciprocity-based duties *to* these non-rational beings. In this case, the rational agents might be the source of these duties, but they are not the (only) individuals to whom these duties are owed.

In Chapter 8, Korsgaard argues that rational agents not only can but must accept laws that extend rights to non-rational sentient beings. Why? Because if we value anything at all, then we must value all human and nonhuman animals as ends. In particular, we cannot value anything at all unless we value ourselves as ends, with goods that are good absolutely. And we cannot value ourselves as ends unless we value other human and nonhuman animals as ends as well. The upshot is that in valuing things, we commit ourselves to seeing humans as "active ends", who co-legislate the moral law, and animals as "passive ends", who receive rights under the moral law.

In Chapter 9, Korsgaard examines the relationship between Kantianism and utilitarianism. In her view, these theories agree that sentient beings have moral standing, but they disagree about how to treat sentient beings. She focuses mostly on comparability and aggregation. On one hand, since utilitarianism holds that pleasure is an intrinsic good, it implies that a world with more net pleasure can be better than a world with less. On the other hand, since Kantianism holds that pleasure is a tethered good, it implies that a world with more net pleasure can be better than a world with less *only if* it is better for all involved – which is, of course, unlikely.

In Chapter 10, Korsgaard explores what she calls the animal antinomy. In particular, there is an apparent contradiction in the idea that we have a duty to both help and not harm animals. On one hand, if we have a duty to help animals, it seems to follow that we should make them all domesticated, so that we can protect them from the harms of nature. On the other hand, if we have a duty not to harm animals, it seems to follow that we should make

them all wild, so that we can protect them from the harms of humanity. Korsgaard finds both ideas plausible, and her aim in the final chapters is to explore them and search for ways to resolve the tension between them.

In Chapter 11, Korsgaard explores our duties to wild animals. She denies that species have moral standing, since species lack selves with final goods. However, she accepts that we should care about groups of animals for other reasons. For example, we should care about present communities of animals and future generations of animals because members of these groups have certain shared interests and needs. At the same time, we should not take on the role of creator with respect to future generations of animals since, if we did that, then our duties of creation to future wild animals would conflict with our duties of preservation to current wild animals.

Finally, in Chapter 12, Korsgaard explores our duties to domesticated animals. She accepts that animal use can be permissible in theory, since we can use animals in respectful ways at least in theory, but she argues that most animal use is impermissible in practice, since we mostly use animals in disrespectful ways in practice. However, she does not, like some abolitionists, see our poor treatment of domesticated animals as a reason to bring about their extinction. Instead, she sees it as a reason to treat them well, though she notes that we are better able to do this for some domesticated animals than others in the context of current human homes and societies.

Along the way Korsgaard discusses many other issues as well, with varying degrees of connection to her main thesis that, if we value anything at all, then we must value humans as active ends and animals as passive ends. These issues include the harm of death, the ethics of abortion, the ethics of human extinction, and the non-identity problem. These discussions are short but helpful, not only because they are intrinsically interesting but also because they allow the reader to see the broader system within which Korsgaard is situating her main thesis.

This is a book that only Korsgaard could have written. As always, her writing is clear and engaging, with a conversational, entertaining style (e.g., see her amusing suggestion about dust mites on 217). The methodology is part history of philosophy, part argument from principle, and part argument from intuition. Whether or not you agree with it all, you have to admire those moments when it all comes together, e.g., when Korsgaard concludes a chapter by noting that when we treat animals badly, we not only fail them but fail at being the kind of animal we are (52).

Does the core argument of this book succeed? This is a hard question to answer. As mentioned above, Korsgaard is weaving together decades of work in metaethics, normative ethics, applied ethics, and history of philosophy to show that if you value anything at all, then you must value humans as active ends and animals as passive ends. This is extraordinary. However, it also means that Korsgaard is not able to fully discuss everything

that she needs to discuss in order to establish this thesis in this book alone. This is the book that you read to see how the entire system fits together and applies to animals. To see the full argument for each part of the system, there is no substitute for reading her other books and articles and the surrounding literatures.

If you do read these literatures, then you will find many people expressing skepticism about the argument that, if you value anything at all, then you must value yourself and others as ends. I am somewhat skeptical of this argument myself, for reasons that Sharon Street articulates in "Coming to Terms with Contingency" (Lenman & Shemmer, eds., *Constructivism in Practical Philosophy*, [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012]). However, I think that Korsgaard makes a good case here for the conditional that, *if* you accept this argument for humans, *then* you should accept it for animals too. Moreover, even if you are skeptical about this argument, you might still think that most of us, as a matter of fact, commit ourselves to valuing human and nonhuman animals as ends for roughly the reasons that Korsgaard outlines in this book. That would still be a powerful conclusion.

Given the ambitious nature of this book, I of course have many more questions and comments than I can discuss here. Instead of trying to discuss everything, I will focus on some of the issues that are specific to this book. I will start by considering her rejection of the AMC, and I will then consider her rejection of aggregation and utilitarianism.

First, consider the AMC, which, as noted above, holds that there is no morally relevant property that all and only humans possess. As Korsgaard discusses, the core idea of the AMC is that we cannot plausibly maintain that all and only humans have moral standing, since, for any property or relation that plausibly grounds moral standing, either some humans will lack it, some nonhumans will have it, or both. For example, if we deny that nonhumans have moral standing on the grounds that they are non-rational, then we must also deny that at least some humans, such as infants or adults who lack the ability to reason, have moral standing on the same grounds. Korsgaard rejects this argument on the grounds that (a) very few humans lack the ability to reason, (b) all humans have a rational form of life (and thus are relevantly different from nonhumans who do not), and (c) infants, as temporal parts, are not moral subjects at all (and thus are relevantly different from nonhumans who are). However, while I fully agree with the first claim and partly agree with the second and the third (e.g., I agree that proponents of the AMC often express this argument in simplistic, reductive, and appropriative terms), I also partly disagree with the second and the third claims, and I think that we can accept the core idea of the AMC either way.

First, consider the claim that all humans have a rational form of life. Korsgaard defends this claim on the grounds that whereas nonhumans can function well without the ability to reason (and therefore they count as non-rational), humans cannot (and therefore they count as rational) (83-5). However, I am not persuaded by this argument. While I agree that there are many relevant differences between humans and nonhumans who lack the ability to reason, I also think that there are at least some relevant differences between humans who have this ability and humans who lack it (rare as the latter may be). Insofar as we have different interests, needs, and vulnerabilities, we can also have different forms of life and standards of functioning. Moreover, we can realize these forms of life with proper support (which, of course, we all need in our own way, even if the support that some of us need is more common, and so easier to take for granted, than the support that others of us need). For this reason, I think that it is better to say that humans who lack the ability to reason are non-rational (and capable of functioning well relative to this standard) than to say that they are rational (and incapable of functioning well relative to this standard).

Second, consider the claim that infants, as temporal parts, are not moral subjects. Korsgaard defends this claim on the grounds that when our temporal parts think and act in a unified way, they become a unified self (81-3). She then claims that this unified self has moral standing "atemporally," i.e., at all times, and that the temporal parts do not have moral standing at all (86-93). However, I am not persuaded by this argument either. While I agree that the temporal whole has moral standing atemporally, I think that the temporal parts do too. Compare: When you and I think and act in a unified way, we become a shared agent, with a shared good and a shared set of duties and rights. But we do not thereby lose our duties and rights as individuals. Instead, we have moral standing individually and collectively at the same time. I think that the same is true of our temporal parts. Insofar as they think and act in a unified way, they become a unified self, with a shared good and a shared set of duties and rights. But they do not thereby lose their duties and rights as temporal parts. Instead, they have moral standing as temporal parts and as a temporal whole at the same time. Moreover, at both levels, they have this moral standing atemporally.

Third, and in any case, I think that we can accept the core idea of the AMC whether or not we accept my responses in the previous two paragraphs. That is, we can accept that, for any property or relation that plausibly grounds moral standing, either some humans will lack it, some nonhumans will have it, or both. Why? Because even if we agree that all humans have a rational form of life and have moral standing only as temporal wholes, it does not follow that all humans are "capable of joining with us in reciprocal legislation" (141), and, therefore, it does not follow that all humans have moral standing on a rationalist theory of moral standing. Instead, and at most, it follows

that all humans have a distinctive set of interests, needs, and vulnerabilities, and, therefore, that they have a distinctive set of rights on a sentientist theory of moral standing. But of course, a proponent of the AMC can accept this. They would simply add that, if the ability to reason about universal laws is necessary to have moral standing at all, then at least some humans will lack moral standing. Whereas if the ability to suffer is sufficient to have moral standing at all, then at least some nonhumans will have moral standing.

Finally, consider two claims about aggregation and utilitarianism. First, Korsgaard argues that if "the good is tethered, then the idea of an aggregate good does not make sense" (157). However, I think that even if the good is tethered, the idea of an aggregate good can still make sense, for two reasons. First, the good can be tethered to *agents* without being tethered to *patients*. For example, a constructivist utilitarian can say that (a) something is good if and only if we value it, and that (b) aggregate pleasure is good. The first claim is a metaethical claim about the source of the good, and it implies that something is good if and only if it is good *to* agents. The second claim is a normative claim about the nature of the good, and it does not imply that something is good if and only if it is good *for* patients. Second, even if we accept that the good is tethered to patients as well, we can still make sense of the idea of an aggregate good. For example, we can say that individual pleasures are good for individual patients, and that the goodness of aggregate pleasure derives from the goodness of individual pleasures. Of course, there are still problems with aggregation. But it is not clear to me that the idea that the good is tethered is one of them.

Second, Korsgaard addresses conflicts of duty by claiming that we should (a) avoid them where possible (182-8) and (b) accept that we cannot always do what we should otherwise (217-8). She also claims that we can avoid conflicts of duty with respect to current and future wild animals if we avoid taking on the role of creator with respect to future wild animals (185-6). However, I am not sure that we can avoid taking on a role that we have already taken on. As Korsgaard notes, we are already determining which wild animals will exist and what their lives will be like (183). In my view, this already commits us to duties of assistance to future wild animals, since we have a duty to reduce and/or repair the harms that we are causing them. Of course, this might or might mean that we should domesticate wild animals (which is the kind of intervention that Korsgaard is primarily discussing). Either way, conflicts of duty with respect to current and future wild animals will be unavoidable moving forward. And, while I appreciate that Korsgaard sees problems with aggregation as an approach to resolving these conflicts, it is not clear to me that her approach is better, since her approach seems to allow for no way of resolving these conflicts at all.

I have suggested that even if we agree with Korsgaard that rational sentient beings are active ends and non-rational sentient beings are passive ends, we can derive different conclusions from these premises depending on how we answer some of the other questions that Korsgaard discusses in this book. Since I think that these details matter, I will be excited to see how the literature around this book develops. However, I also think that it would be a mistake to miss the forest for the trees. This is an important and impressive work of systematic moral philosophy that deserves a wide audience. It works within historical traditions while boldly reimagining them in ways that few philosophers are able and willing to do. Agree or disagree, every moral philosopher should engage with this book.

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