

**“Eschatology for Creeping Things (And Other Animals),” invited chapter in *The Lost Sheep in Philosophy of Religion: New Perspectives on Disability, Gender, Race, and Animals*, ed. by Kevin Timpe and Blake Hereth, Routledge (forthcoming).**

## **1. Introduction**

Analytic philosophy of religion, like many things, has traditionally been pretty anthropocentric. This has changed somewhat in recent years. More attention has been paid to theological issues surrounding non-human animals, such as their post-mortem fate and the implications of their suffering on the problem of evil (e.g., Murray 2008; Pawl 2014; Graves, Hereth and John 2017). The importance of these issues arises partly because of the importance of non-human animals themselves,<sup>1</sup> but also partly because of differences between non-human animals and humans (or, in some cases, most adult humans) which raise significant theological questions, preventing us from simply applying answers developed for humans to the animal case. For instance: non-human animals apparently lack moral agency of the sort that could make them deserve to suffer, or be responsible for missing out on a good afterlife; they’ve existed longer than humans, so it is hard to see how their suffering could be the result of the biblical Fall; their comparatively limited reflective capacities may make it harder to see how they could benefit from suffering; scriptures and traditions tend to say a lot less about them, so that matters concerning them involve more in the way of philosophical speculation; there is more dispute

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<sup>1</sup> An example of what I mean: consider *star universalism*, which states that every star which has ever existed will exist forever in the New Heaven. There is a lot say about this position philosophically--it implicates various questions about mereology, gappy existence, etc.--but no one has said it, because whether star universalism is true doesn’t, comparatively speaking, matter very much. On the other hand, whether animal universalism is true matters a lot. And this is because animals matter a lot.

over whether it's metaphysically possible for them to survive death; etc. Less attention has been paid to the possibility that the many differences *between* non-human animals might also have important theological implications. Authors often *say* they are discussing all, or all sentient, non-human animals, but give arguments which could only apply to members of "higher" animal species, such as mammals, and often only to some members of those species (cf. Crummett 2017, 73, esp. fns. 2-3).<sup>2</sup>

This is understandable, since the literature is comparatively small, and had to start somewhere. But I think it's important to move beyond treating non-humans as a mostly undifferentiated group. The best way to argue for this is probably just to do it, and show that interesting results follow. In any event, that's what I tried to do in an earlier work (Crummett 2017). There, I discussed the implications for the problem of evil of focusing on "creeping things," by which I meant, basically, insects and relevantly similar animals. (My grouping all these very different creatures under one heading may well turn out to be an instance of the phenomenon I am criticizing. But, again, we have to start somewhere.) I argued that it was plausible that many creeping things could suffer, and that, if they did, certain facts about them--such as their numbers, their method of reproduction, and their level of psychological sophistication--might make their suffering harder for theists to address than the suffering of the "higher" animals who get attention from theodocists.

Here, I will discuss animal universalism, which I define as the view that all non-human animals with interests will eventually receive eternal, infinitely good afterlives. When I say that an animal "has interests," I mean that things can be good or bad *for that animal*. I think that

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<sup>2</sup> A major exception is Pawl 2014, which represents the sort of thing I think we need.

sentience is a necessary and sufficient condition for having interests, but some philosophers have thought that non-sentient creatures might also have interests, and even (implausibly) that some sentient animals don't have interests (Crummett 2017, 75-77). I mostly won't need to take a stand on that here. For purposes of this chapter, I will assume that creeping things have interests, which I've argued elsewhere (74-77) is credible, though uncertain. I will also assume that theism is true. When I discuss what I call "arguments for animal universalism," what I really mean are arguments that, *conditional on theism (and sometimes certain other beliefs which theists often hold)*, animal universalism is true.

In this chapter, I have two aims. The first is just to evaluate the major arguments for animal universalism. I discuss six arguments: a *beneficence* argument, a *harm avoidance* argument, a *divine love* argument, a *relationship* argument, a *compensation* argument, and an *equality* argument. I claim that the beneficence and divine love arguments succeed, that the relationship argument fails in its original form but can be made powerful, and that the compensation argument fails but can provide support for a controversial premise shared by the previous arguments. I claim that, taken together, these four arguments provide a strong case for animal universalism, while the remaining arguments require further development if they are to work.

The secondary aim is to show how attending to the differences between animals can illuminate this discussion. Both the harm avoidance argument and the currently existing form of the relationship argument probably establish that *some* non-human animals will receive good afterlives, but fail to establish animal *universalism* because they invoke considerations which can

probably only be applied to *some* non-human animals with interests. Recognizing this fact is important for developing better versions of these arguments in the future.

Before moving on, I'll note that there is at least one possible argument for animal universalism which, for reasons of space, I won't discuss at any length. Call it the *theodicy argument*. One might think that the best explanation for why God allows animal suffering has to do with some benefit which accrues to the animal, such as soul-making or a closer relationship with God (cf. Pawl 2014; Murray 2008, ch. 4). And it might be thought that such an explanation requires some form of animal afterlife, either because so many animals die in their suffering and apparently don't reap the relevant benefits, or because reaping these benefits would require that their cognitive faculties be enhanced in some way beyond what they enjoy in their earthly lives. A good animal afterlife might then be a kind of theoretical posit invoked to explain why God allows evil. (This differs from the compensation argument, discussed later. The theodicy argument suggests that an afterlife is necessary to explain why God allows animal suffering in the first place. The compensation argument grants that God's reason for allowing suffering in the first place may be something with no particular connection to an animal afterlife or to animal well-being, but suggests that God should compensate animals for their suffering, and that such compensation requires an afterlife.) All I will say about the theodicy argument is that I have argued elsewhere (Crummett 2017, 85-86) that theodicies of the relevant sort can be applied much more easily to some animals than others. So attempts to mount a theodicy argument for animal universalism must also attend to the differences between non-human animals.

## **2. The beneficence argument**

One good argument for animal universalism is extremely straightforward. The basic idea is that giving animals eternal, infinitely good afterlives would sure do them a lot of good, and wouldn't hurt anything, and so seems like something God ought to do. Specifically, I formulate the argument like this:

1. If an agent can benefit an individual with moral standing and there is no sufficiently good reason for the agent not to provide the benefit, the agent has a duty to so benefit the individual.
  2. Non-human animals with interests are individuals with moral standing.
  3. God is an agent who can benefit non-humans animals with interests by giving them eternal, infinitely good afterlives.
  4. There is no sufficiently good reason for God not to do so.
  5. God has a duty to benefit non-human animals with interests by giving them eternal, infinitely good afterlives (from 1-4).
  6. God acts in accordance with God's duties.
- C. Animal universalism (i.e., the view that all non-human animals with interests will receive an eternal, infinitely good afterlife) is true (from 5 & 6).

As far as I know, this argument is original to me, though it's reminiscent of a beneficence based argument for human universalism given by Eric Reitan and John Kronen (2011, >>>). There are a number of differences between their argument and mine. Apart from the fact that I focus on non-humans where they focus on humans, the most notable one is that they treat beneficence as a kind of free-standing divine attribute, whereas I (for purposes of this argument) treat it as arising from God's moral goodness. In doing this, I assume that God has moral obligations, and that the fundamental moral principles governing divine action are more or less the same as those which apply to other agents. This is slightly controversial (e.g., Adams 2017 and Murphy 2017), but I can't defend it here. Readers who deny that God has duties of the sort that I think, but who agree

that God is beneficent, are welcome to reinterpret the argument accordingly. (For an argument *against* treating beneficence as a free standing attribute, at least if it is taken to be an *essential* divine attribute, see Murphy 2017, ch. 2.)

Premise 1 is a statement affirming what W.D. Ross (1930, ch. 2) would have called a “duty of beneficence”--a *prima facie* duty to benefit others. When I say that an all-things-considered duty to benefit exists when there is “no sufficiently good reason for the agent not to provide the benefit,” I want to be pretty liberal about what *sort* of thing might count as a sufficiently good reason. Such reasons could include that providing the benefit would conflict with another duty the agent has, that it would cost the agent more than morality can reasonably demand, that the beneficiary has waived their claim to the benefit, that the beneficiary is very bad and deserves to suffer, and so on.

With this broad understanding of “sufficiently good reason” in mind, I think Premise 1 is very plausible. If I could press a conveniently located button and thereby provide a huge benefit to a stranger in Kazakhstan, and I have no reason (other than the mild cost of reaching for the button) not to press it, I think it would be, not just nice, but *obligatory* for me to press it--the stranger could reasonably blame me for the fact that I literally refused to lift a finger in order to provide them a great benefit. There are some nihilists and some hard-nosed libertarians who will reject this. But I think most people will accept the premise, or something near enough the premise as to make no difference to the argument.

Premise 2 states that non-humans have moral standing, which means, roughly, that they are directly owed some kind of moral consideration. You and I have moral standing, but rocks don't; how I treat a rock might be morally important, but only derivatively, because of some

connection it has to a being with moral standing. (Maybe it's your pet rock.) Note that this doesn't entail any strong thesis about the moral *equality* of humans and non-human animals (though such a thesis is also true). All it requires is that non-human animals are sources of moral claims of *some* strength: nothing I do can wrong a rock, but many actions could wrong a cat. Again, some people will deny this. But denying it is absurd. C'est la vie.

Premise 3 says that God can benefit non-humans by giving them eternal, infinitely good afterlives. There are two ways one might dissent. First, one might claim that animals couldn't benefit from an eternal afterlife. This seems implausible. All I need is the claim that there's *some possible* environment, or series of environments, which would make continued life good indefinitely for each non-human animal. Whether this would involve, say, the beatific vision, or else just cat toys and things to climb on, it seems clear to me that God could come up with *something* for each animal with interests which would indefinitely be better for it than non-existence.

Alternatively, one might claim that it's not possible for animals to have *any* afterlife. The ground would presumably be that animals don't have souls, or the right *kind* of soul (e.g., to use Thomistic terms, a rational, as opposed to a merely animal or vegetative soul), where a soul, or the right kind of soul, is necessary to survive death. But I think this is very implausible. One would need to establish the relevant thesis about animal souls. But one would also need to defeat the various suggestions about how humans might survive death if some form of materialism is true (e.g., van Inwagen 1978). Even if dualism is true about humans, so that God doesn't need to resort to these measures, God could still use them on animals, if materialism is true for them. I'll also present another reason for rejecting this line of argument in section 6.

Premise 4 says that there is no sufficiently good reason for God not to benefit non-humans with interests by giving them eternal, infinitely good afterlives. Because we're talking about an *infinite* benefit, the *pro tanto* obligation to provide the benefit will have tremendous force, and any reason sufficient to defeat it would need to correspondingly impressive. What could this reason be? Excluding humans from paradise is generally thought to be justified either on grounds of retributive justice or respect for autonomy, but neither of these considerations seems applicable to non-human animals. There doesn't seem to be anything else which would benefit animals more, and which a good afterlife rules out. It's not as though God has finite resources, so benefiting non-humans in this way wouldn't detract from benefiting us. And it doesn't seem that God must exert effort, or otherwise bear any sort of unreasonable cost, to save animals from death.

Some skeptical theists might complain that this line of reasoning involves a so-called *noseeum* inference--an inference from the fact that we can't see a good reason for God to do something to the claim that God has no good reason to do it. They will say that our cognitive faculties are so puny that such inferences are unjustified. I agree that the argument I've given involves such an inference. There are two things to note. First, endorsing even very strong versions of skeptical theism as a response to the problem of evil does not require the claim that we can *never* employ *noseeum* inferences to determine what a good God would do. For instance, Mike Rea (2013, 483) defines skeptical theism as the thesis that "No human being is justified (or warranted, or reasonable) in thinking the following about any evil *e* that has ever occurred: there is (or is probably) no reason that could justify God in permitting *e*," noting that this "leaves open the possibility that an evil might someday occur about which we can justifiably think that it is

gratuitous.” So, for instance, this allows that we can safely conclude that God couldn’t have a sufficiently good reason to condemn a group of innocent people to eternal torture, even while we’re (supposedly) unable to conclude the same about actual evils. As I suggested above, God’s *pro tanto* obligation to give animals a blissful afterlife is *extremely* weighty: any countervailing consideration would need to justify denying these animals an *infinite* benefit. It’s consistent to say that we can judge it very unlikely that any such consideration exists while denying that the same is true of the evils we observe around us. So a skeptical theist at least doesn’t *need* to reject my argument.

The second point--which I’ll state even though I know it’s controversial, and I can’t defend it here--is that I think philosophical reasoning about God’s action in general requires us to make certain noseem inferences, so that any *in principle* objection to these inferences would undermine our ability to reason about God’s actions more broadly. In other words, *any* time we judge that God would or wouldn’t do something, we are committed to the judgment that God doesn’t have adequate reason for acting otherwise. Indeed, I agree with the claim, made by some authors (e.g., Wielenberg 2010 and Hudson 2014), that even our ability to trust divine revelation depends on a noseem inference, since it relies on the claim that God would not deceive us, which in turn requires the claim that God doesn’t have sufficient reason to deceive us. So if the problem with this premise is an in principle objection to noseem inferences, I think the same reasoning will lead to untoward implications elsewhere.

The rest of the argument is easy. Premise 5 follows from Premises 1-4. Premise 6 says that God complies with God’s duties. Everyone accepts that. (Even people who think that God

has no duties will agree that, for all the duties God has, God complies with them.) From Premises 5 and 6, animal universalism follows.

### **3. The harm avoidance argument**

A subtly different argument for animal universalism comes from Shawn Graves, Blake Hereth, and Tyler John (2017, 181; Hereth 2017, 175-179). They claim that animals have a “right to avoid harm,” and that this provides others with a duty not to deny animals the opportunity to avoid harm. For instance, they claim that “it would be a violation of an animal’s right to avoid harm to deny that animal the opportunity to flee from attackers or seek shelter from a lightning storm” (Graves et al. 2017, 181). They suggest that ceasing to exist would be extremely bad for an animal, and this gives God a strong obligation to grant animals immortality.

This differs from my beneficence argument in that it appeals, not to the claim that continued existence would be *good* for animals and an attendant duty of beneficence, but instead to the claim that the cessation of existence would be *bad* for animals and an attendant duty to help others avoid harm. I see two ways in which this argument might seem to have an advantage over the beneficence argument. First, it might seem clearer that we have a duty to help others avoid harm than that we have a duty to benefit them; this would provide additional support for the analogue of the beneficence argument’s Premise 1. Second, it might seem plausible that the duty to help others avoid harm tends to be stronger, *ceteris paribus*, than the duty to help them. This would provide additional support for the analogue of the beneficence argument’s Premise 4. These are advantages, but I don’t think they are big ones, since, given the reasons surveyed in the previous section, I think Premises 1 and 4 of the beneficence argument are already very well supported. Meanwhile, the harm avoidance argument faces a unique difficulty of its own.

My worry has to do with the sense in which the cessation of existence is taken to be a *harm* which others have a duty to help one avoid. Whether the cessation of existence is a harm at all has been a topic of debate among philosophers at least since Epicurus, and continues to be one now. If it's *not*, then, of course, the harm avoidance argument doesn't work. In laying out their case, Graves et al. seem tacitly to rely on the so-called preference satisfaction theory of well-being, which identifies well-being with desire satisfaction and ill-being with desire frustration (cf. Crummett 2017, 75-77), writing that "animals are harmed when their basic creaturely desires are frustrated, setback, or defeated" (Graves et al. 2017, 181). Within this framework, their explanation of how cessation of existence would harm animals has two elements.

The first element is that the cessation of existence "marks the end of any possible future desire satisfaction" (181). The idea is that it constitutes a harm because it deprives the animal of future flourishing. (Certain difficulties arise in the case of animals who would have had bad lives had they not died, but set that aside; see Hereth 2017, 176-177.) This proposal is in line with Ben Bradley's suggestion that death is bad for non-human animals if and only if it "makes that individual's lifetime wellbeing level lower than it would otherwise have been" (2015, 51). This view in turn meshes well with the so-called "comparative account of harm," according to which "a harmful event is an event that makes things go worse for someone, on the whole, than they would have gone if the event had not happened" (Bradley 2012, 396). But the comparative account of harm doesn't seem right, and if it's true, harm doesn't seem to have the special normative significance which would differentiate the beneficence and harm avoidance arguments. Suppose I request that Bill Gates hire a full-time chef to prepare me tasty but

reasonably nutritious vegan cookies. Suppose Gates refuses my request, and that in the nearest possible world where he doesn't refuse my request, I receive much more desire satisfaction, since he grants it. The comparative account of harm implies that Bill Gates' refusal harms me, since, in the closest possible world where it didn't occur, I was much better off (cf. 397). But this doesn't seem right. Further, even if Gates does harm me, his harming me in this way clearly can't be worse than his failing to provide me with a proportional benefit, since it just *is* his failing to provide me with a benefit.

I don't have my own account of harm, and providing one is extremely difficult (Bradley 2012). But my own sense is that God's failing to provide creatures with future desire satisfaction via an afterlife would be relevantly like Bill Gates' failing to provide me with future desire satisfaction via a pastry chef, insofar as both represent a failure to benefit but not a harm or a failure to help one avoid harm (or at least, not a harm in the sense that makes the act especially significant). As the beneficence argument indicates, failures to benefit can also be extremely morally weighty. But insofar as this is the concern, I think we would do better to just focus directly on the duty to benefit, while side-stepping questions about harm.

But Graves et al. also provide another explanation for why cessation of existence is supposed to be harmful. It's that it involves the "ultimate and final frustration of the animal's desires" (181). The preference satisfaction theory views desire frustration as *positively bad* for you, and so might allow us to see how cessation of existence is harmful, in the relevant sense. (So, if I have only one desire and it's frustrated, I'm worse off than if I had no desires, even though I have no *fulfilled* desires in either case.) But it seems that the only desires which can be frustrated just by my ceasing to exist are ones which are about the *future*. Sitting here writing

this, I want to do certain things in the future: to finish and publish this chapter; to go with my significant other, Xia, to Pittsburgh tomorrow; to ensure the continued well-being of my cats, Artemis and Apollo; and so on. If I were to die in the next second, all these desires would be frustrated. I also have certain desires about the present moment: I want the bed I am sitting on to be comfortable, not only in the future, but also right now. However, if I only ever have desires about the present, then ceasing existence will never frustrate any of my desires. After all, the moments at which I don't exist are ones at which I have no desires to frustrate.

Whether this argument works for non-human animals, then, depends on whether they have future-directed desires which can be frustrated if they cease existing. Is it the case that all non-human with interests--which, given the preference satisfaction theory of well-being, means all non-humans with desires--have future-directed desires? Some don't think so. Peter Singer argues that having future-directed desires requires "the capacity to see oneself as an individual existing over time" (1993, 119). He thinks (ch. 4) that some non-human animals, like perhaps healthy adult members of some great ape species, have this capacity, but that most animals do not. For instance, a fish may "struggle to get free of the barbed hook in its mouth," but Singer thinks this is merely the result of a "preference for the cessation of a state of affairs that is perceived as painful or frightening," not the result of the fish "preferring their own future existence to non-existence" (95). Accordingly, given the preference-satisfaction view of well-being, a fish could not be harmed in the relevant way by a painless death. (The preference-satisfaction view, combined with Singer's utilitarianism, is also partly responsible for his notorious views on the permissibility of killing infants and other humans who arguably lack future-directed desires. The repugnance of these views suggests that we should be wary in

general of thinking that the frustration of future-directed desires is what makes it wrong to let individuals die.) Other views about the capacity to have future-directed desires will be more inclusive. For instance, there are some insects who engage in what appears to be long-term planning, and certain theories of mind will treat this as good evidence of future-directed desires (Crummett 2017, 76). However, Graves et al. (2017, 161) define animal universalism as the view that “all sentient animals will be brought into Heaven and remain there for eternity.” Even if many more animals than we think possess future-directed desires, it would obviously require much more in the way of argument to show that *all* sentient animals have future-directed desires, and thus fall within the scope of the harm avoidance argument.

We are now in a position to see how the harm avoidance argument, as given by Graves et al., falters. Perhaps it would succeed *if* all non-humans with interests had minds basically like those of, say, healthy adult great apes. But I claim that Graves et al. pay insufficient attention to the differences between non-human animals. (Hereth (2017, 176), in arguing that cessation of existence constitutes a harm for non-human animals, generalizes from one case: that of Sadie, a dog who dies just before she gets to play on a beach, a prospect which has excited her throughout a long car ride. It seems plausible that Sadie has a future-directed desire which would be frustrated if she ceased to exist. But what isn't obvious is whether we can generalize from this case.) It turns out that the harm avoidance argument, as stated, most clearly applies only to a fairly narrow class of animals, so that it has not been shown that it can establish animal *universalism*.

The proponent of the argument now has a number of options. They might attempt to show that all non-humans with interests (or, as Graves et al. put it, all sentient non-humans) have

future-directed desires after all. This would likely involve a great deal of empirical investigation, with careful attention to neurological and psychological differences between different species, and between individuals within species. Alternatively, one might argue that death is harmful for reasons besides the frustration of future-directed desires. For instance, Frances Kamm (1998, ch. 3) argues that (on the assumption that there is no afterlife) death is harmful because, in taking what an individual had, it constitutes a kind of *insult*, and because it represents the final extinction of a life, which is bad for one in and of itself. If these factors apply to humans, they plausibly would also apply to non-humans with interests. Or perhaps thinking about the ethics of letting die will ultimately convince us that allowing someone to cease to exist would be wrong for some reason *besides* its being harmful or its representing a failure to provide a benefit--say, for some deontological reason--which might provide a novel argument for animal universalism. I will not pursue any of these lines here; my aim has instead been to show where more work is needed.

#### **4. The divine love argument**

Graves et al. (2017, 166-172) present another argument for animal universalism which I will term the “divine love argument.” The basic idea is that God, being perfect, would also be perfectly loving, and this perfect love would lead God to benevolently ensure the truth of animal universalism. (This is similar to an argument for human universalism from Reitan and Kronen 2011, >>>). Because I think this argument is sound as it stands, I won’t have much to say about it here. I will instead note that it and the beneficence argument each add something to the other. For purposes of the beneficence argument, I assumed that God had moral obligations, and that these obligations were established by basically the same principles which establish our

obligations. As I noted, this assumption, while popular, is controversial. Some authors, such as Marilyn Adams (2017), have denied that God has any moral obligations to us, but have held that God's *love* would nonetheless lead God to act in certain benevolent ways towards us. On the other hand, Mark Murphy (2017, ch. 2) argues that divine freedom means that God would not *necessarily* be loving in any way which goes beyond what God is obligated to do. (Murphy happens to think that God isn't obligated to do anything for us, but that God, happily, does happen to love us more than God is obliged to. But both of these positions are separable from the argument in question.)

The beneficence and divine love arguments, then, may be able to gain traction against somewhat different audiences. For those who deny that God has moral obligations but who agree that God is loving in the relevant way, the divine love argument may have force which the beneficence argument lacks. On the other hand, for anyone who is not sure that God's love will outstrip what God is morally obligated to do, but who does agree that God has moral obligations which are basically similar to those which we have, the beneficence argument may have force which the divine love argument lacks. The arguments, then, can serve as complements. (Of course, it is also possible to think, like me, that *both* arguments are sound.)

## **5. The relationship argument**

Another argument from Graves et al. (2017, 172-174) appeals, not to the love of God for animals, but rather to the love of God for the *blessed humans* who *themselves* love animals. Thomas Talbott (1999, 136-140) argues for human universalism on the grounds that those humans who *are* saved could not be completely happy while knowing that some of their loved ones had not been saved. If, as seems plausible on independent theological grounds, heaven is to

be a place of perfect happiness, then God must also save the loved ones of anyone who is saved, and Talbott argues that this ultimately implies that God must save *all* humans. (We will return shortly to the question of how Talbott reaches that conclusion). Graves et al. extend an analogy of this argument to non-human animals. They suggest that “those who have relationships with particular animals care about the wellbeing of these animals, and would be adversely affected by the knowledge that they have permanently lost their lives,” such that “those humans in heaven who had meaningful relationships with animals during their mortal lives could not flourish maximally while knowing that their animal companions had been lost forever” (2017, 174). If I arrived in heaven constituted as I currently am and learned that my cats had been annihilated, I think this would indeed prevent my being perfectly happy. Perhaps there are measures God could use to change this--erasing my memory of my cats, or altering me psychologically so that I no longer cared about them--but these changes seem problematic for other reasons. So it seems plausible that if I am to be perfectly happy, my cats will need to be there, too. Perhaps this alone is enough to provide some additional support for the claim that animals can survive death, and so for premise three in the beneficence argument and its analogue in the divine love argument. If we have reason to think I really will be perfectly happy in heaven, and if this requires that my cats survive death, then we have reason to think it’s possible for my cats to survive death. If they can, presumably other non-human animals can, too.

But treating this *directly* as an argument for animal universalism requires confronting the fact that many non-human animals are not involved in any “meaningful relationships” with human beings. It might seem that being good to the blessed humans wouldn’t require God saving those animals. In response, Graves et al. (2017, 174) appeal to a “profound web of

interconnectivity” which allegedly links all non-human animals together. Not only would God need to save those animals with which human beings had relationships:

Each of these animals, in turn, would flourish maximally only if they were able to live in heaven with their non-human families, and with those other animals that they had relationships with prior to their deaths. Humans in heaven would be better-off if all of their animal companions lived alongside them, flourishing maximally, and would therefore be better-off if all of their animal companions’ non-human friends and families were ushered into heaven—along with *their* respective friends and families, and so on—for eternity as well.

Maximizing my flourishing requires maximizing the flourishing of my animal pals, which requires maximizing the flourishing of their animal pals, etc. Graves et al. also add that “each individual animal matters to God. God loves each individual animal, and the loss of these animals would be a great relational loss to God, who looks after each animal and desires their well-being and their companionship” (174). However, insofar as this consideration requires the claim that God would love non-human animals and therefore want to save them, it seems to be parasitic on the considerations driving the earlier divine love argument. If the claim about divine love is *essential* to the relationship argument, it seems to me that the relationship argument would not really constitute a “second argument” as Graves et al. (172) claim, so I will set this consideration aside for now.

Can appeal to this “web of interconnectivity” between animals help us establish animal *universalism*? It may be able to do quite a lot of work. I am not sure whether my cats love, or even remember, their relatives, and their relationships with the squirrels and birds they see through the window don’t seem loving. But maybe *someone’s* cats love their relatives, and some of these relatives love their relatives, and so on. Perhaps we could then construct a chain that included many or even all cats, along with at least some of our cats’ evolutionary ancestors,

along with at least some of the evolutionary descendants of those ancestors, along with various members of other species who cats have established relationships with (the other day I saw a video of cats who were friends with a duck), along with the relatives of *those* animals, etc. But I doubt this can justify including *all* animals with interests, especially if it turns out that creeping things have interests. It seems plausible to think that many insects, say, do not have the ability to love each other. Some of them may be loved by members of other species: perhaps someone loves the ants on their ant farm. But because those ants don't love and aren't loved by other ants, it will not be possible to establish a chain. So some ants living in an isolated part of the wilderness, even if they are sentient, may be out of luck, so far as this argument is concerned. We again see that attention to the diversity among animals threatens the ability of an argument to establish animal *universalism*.

However, I suspect we can rehabilitate the relationship argument by drawing further on Talbott's work. Talbott himself recognizes that, even to establish *human* universalism, he must address the question of "those who are not our loved ones": if there are humans who are not loved by any of the blessed, and are not loved by anyone loved by any of the blessed, etc., could God leave them out to dry? Talbott's response (which Graves et al. don't discuss) is that if there are any other humans who we currently do not love in the relevant way, this is because "our capacity for love is not yet perfected" (139). However, in heaven, our capacity for love will be perfected. (He suggests that such perfection is necessary for our achieving "supreme happiness," but of course there are various other reasons why one might expect such perfection in heaven.) Even if we do not love everyone *as much as* those closest to us, we will nonetheless love everyone enough that we would be precluded from supreme happiness if we knew they weren't

in heaven. Accordingly, if God is to make any of us supremely happy *in our perfected state*, God really will need to save *everyone* (or else prevent from us knowing the truth about the lost, or do some other problematic thing).

We can see the potential application. It may be that none of us *currently* experience the relevant kind of universal love for animals. As my research agenda attests, I think I care far more about insects than most people do: on the assumption that they have interests, I would be willing to make sacrifices to protect their sufficiently great interests. But this is largely the result of a detached judgment. I don't think I *currently love* any insects, much less *all* insects, in the way needed for their well-being and mine to be bound up in the relevant way. Were I to arrive in heaven as I am currently constituted and learn that insects didn't make it, I would think that was too bad, but I don't think it would pose a serious threat to my happiness. Honestly, it might not make me more unhappy than, say, the treatment of Luke Skywalker's character in new *Star Wars* movies. If it prevented my being perfectly happy, I might nonetheless be trivially close to perfectly happy. This is probably partly due to general facts about human self-centeredness (unless you have some sort of personal connection, the current war in Yemen, for instance, probably doesn't have much of an impact on your day-to-day happiness, even if you recognize how terrible it is). And it's probably partly due to the specific fact, which presumably has some sort of evolutionary explanation, that we don't feel much sympathy for bugs. (Don't I *desire* the flourishing of insects? Of course. Does this mean the preference-satisfaction view will count their flourishing as bound up with mine? No. Plausible forms of the view need to somehow restrict detached, purely altruistic desires from counting towards my well-being. Cf. Parfit 1986, 494-495.)

However, it might seem that my detachment is a kind of defect, or at least limitation, in me, a failure on my part to appreciate the value of other creatures and which would have to change for me to reach a perfect state in heaven.<sup>3</sup> St. Isaac the Syrian (1923, 341) wrote that a merciful heart is characterized by:

The burning of the heart unto the whole creation, man, fowls and beasts, demons... so that by the recollection and the sight of them the eyes shed tears on account of the force of mercy which moves the heart by great compassion... it is not able to bear hearing or examining injury or any insignificant suffering of anything in the creation. And therefore even in behalf of the irrational beings... at all times [the person with a merciful heart] offers prayers with tears that they may be guarded and strengthened; even in behalf of the kinds of reptiles, on account of his great compassion which is poured out in his heart without measure, after the example of God.

If I possessed the kind of heart St. Isaac describes, I'm not sure how I would feel about Luke Skywalker, but I'm sure I couldn't forget the creeping things. So it may be that maximal goodness to me will wind up requiring that God save all the animals with interests after all.

Note that the relationship argument has at least one potential advantage over the ordinary divine love argument. Some authors have expressed a great deal of skepticism over our ability to know what divine love would involve (e.g., Rea 2018). This might serve as the basis for an objection to the divine love argument: perhaps we aren't in a position to know whether divine love would lead God to promote the flourishing of non-humans in the relevant way or not. Such skeptical arguments might appeal to various considerations about divine transcendence, and so forth, and so not rule out our ability to

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<sup>3</sup> It doesn't follow that a lack of strong emotion would represent such a failure on the part of everyone. Most obviously, it might mean something very different when experienced by people who are neurodivergent in certain ways. Cf. Bommarito 2018, ch. 4.

know what perfect *human* love would be like. So if we know (from revelation, or whatever) that God will be maximally good to the blessed, and if we can know through reflection on human love that this will require saving the animals, we have a love-based argument for animal universalism which allows us to avoid the kind of philosophical speculation about divine love to which the imagined skeptic objects.

## **6. The compensation argument**

Some have suggested that God has a duty to give creatures who suffer an afterlife, as a way of making their suffering up to them (Murray 2008, 125; Hereth 2017, 179-183). The moral judgment underlying this claim may seem reminiscent of W.D. Ross' (1930, ch. 2) "duty of reparation," the duty to compensate those one has wronged. Of course, God won't *wrong* anyone. But it also seems plausible to think that agents take on a duty to compensate others when they *infringe their rights*, even if they do so permissibly. So if, during a snowstorm, my breaking into your unoccupied cabin and burning the furniture for warmth is the only way to save my life, I infringe your property rights but do so permissibly, since your rights are overridden by the importance of my life (Feinberg 1978). But while I did not *wrong* you, I nevertheless owe you compensation. (Contrast this with a case where I break into the cabin looking for the map of the bombs you placed around the city. Here, it seems plausible that your property right against me actually has no moral force: it is not merely overridden but has been *forfeited* by you, so that I do not infringe your right. And here you are not owed compensation.)

Non-human animals clearly experience severe harms as a result of God's creative choices, with many having earthly lives containing far more suffering than flourishing. God could prevent these harms, but does not. God presumably has some good reason for all this, and

so doesn't wrong them, but it does seem plausible that God infringes their rights--perhaps the right against being harmed, or the right to help in avoiding harm mentioned by Graves et al. So it seems plausible that God has a *pro tanto* obligation to compensate them. And God is capable of providing compensation, and indeed, is often the only agent capable of doing so. So there's some reason to expect that God will compensate them. Since such compensation could apparently only occur in the afterlife, there's then some reason to believe in an animal afterlife.

Unfortunately, the compensation argument cannot establish animal universalism, as I have defined it. It apparently could show only that God has an obligation to grant post-mortem compensation to non-humans who have been harmed during their lives, and it is not clear that this is true of every animal with interests. Further, it could not establish that even animals who are owed compensation are owed *eternal, infinitely good* afterlives, rather than just enough to make up for their suffering. (One might claim that some earthly suffering is so bad that no finite amount of good can outweigh it, but this is implausible; the arguments from Crummett 2017, 80-83 can be adapted to show this.) Accordingly, all the argument can show is that some amount of post-mortem compensation, for some humans and animals, is necessary.

Blake Hereth (2017, 175; 179-183) responds to these worries, making two main points. In response to the claim that the argument can show only that animals are owed a finite amount of compensation, Hereth writes that "because [the animals] would be unjustly harmed again if they were brought to a good afterlife and then sent to a harmful afterlife or perpetual nonexistence, the good afterlife must be a perpetual one" (175). And in response to the suggestion that only animals who suffered need to be compensated, Hereth writes that "it would be unfair to restrict

an escape from death... to animals who have been unjustly harmed” (ibid.), so that others must be included, too.

But I doubt these moves work. Consider the first point. Note that it presupposes that going out of existence would be harmful, which I argued earlier required further defense. But grant that it would be harmful. If the claim is that God wouldn’t allow this harm because God wouldn’t deprive an animal of an opportunity to escape this harm, then the argument becomes parasitic on the harm avoidance argument. On the other hand, if the worry is just that animals would be owed compensation for this harm, it isn’t clear to me why God couldn’t compensate animals *in advance* for the harm of going out of existence, while they yet exist. So, suppose my earthly suffering will be outweighed by X years of heavenly life, and the harm of ceasing existence by Y years of heavenly life; it’s not clear why God couldn’t appropriately compensate me by providing me with X+Y years of heavenly life, and then letting me cease existing. (Perhaps there’s something odd about compensating someone for a *wrongful* act in advance, but there’s nothing similarly odd about compensating them for a justified rights infringement. For instance, before breaking into your cabin, I might Venmo you an appropriate amount of money.)

Now consider the second point. Hereth’s reason for endorsing the claim that it would be unjust to grant immortal bliss to animals who are harmed but not those who aren’t is that “If [an] animal has not suffered unjust harm, then that animal should not be permitted to be worse off on grounds of having not suffered unjust harm, and should therefore share the same fate as other animals (i.e., immortality)” (183). This is an expression of a moral principle which I will question in my discussion of the equality argument. But grant it for now. This principle still

requires giving unharmed animals immortal bliss only if harmed animals also get immortal bliss. So it requires the success of the previous point. So I think the compensation argument fails.

Of course, if God saves *some* non-humans and sustains them post-mortem for *some* length of time, one might wonder why God wouldn't just go ahead and save them all, and sustain them forever. After all, it doesn't seem like it would hurt anything, and it would certainly help the animals. This brings us back around to the beneficence argument, and in fact, I want to suggest that the best use for the compensation argument is probably as support for premise 3 ("God can benefit non-human animals with interests by giving them eternal, infinitely good afterlives") of the beneficence argument, and for the analogous premises in the divine love and relationship arguments. (Modifying the compensation argument to support the claim that God is able to give non-humans immortality is also briefly suggested by Graves et al. 2017, 182, fn. 53). If the moral claim underlying the compensation argument is correct, then, conditional on letting non-humans suffer, God has a strong *pro tanto* obligation to grant them post-mortem compensation. If God will be unable to make good on this obligation, then that would be a reason not to let them suffer to begin with. But God does let them suffer to begin with; that God would have strong reason not to do this if God could not compensate them therefore provides good evidence that God is able to compensate them. And if non-humans who suffer are able to survive death, presumably others are, too. The reason God sustains *all* non-humans with interests *forever* has to do with beneficence or love or relationships rather than compensation, but the duty to compensate provides evidence that this is possible.

Of course, I don't claim that this argument is decisive. Clearly something overrode God's reasons not to let animals suffer to begin with; maybe something could also override God's

reasons not to let them suffer without compensation. But my point here is just that the duty to compensate provides additional evidence for a premise which, for reasons discussed previously, I think already has much to be said for it.

## **7. The equality argument**

A final way of arguing for animal universalism is suggested by Graves et al. (2017, 174-180). Their equality argument attempts to show that there is no morally relevant difference which would favor allowing humans, but not sentient non-human animals, into heaven; from this, it concludes that, assuming humans get into heaven, excluding sentient non-human animals would be an unjust form of speciesist discrimination. They summarize the argument as follows:

There is no morally relevant property that distinguishes animals from human beings with respect to whether it is good to have an opportunity to enter and remain within heaven. But if there is no morally relevant property that distinguishes animals from human beings with respect to whether it is good to have an opportunity to enter and remain within heaven, then if human beings are offered an opportunity to enter and remain within heaven, then it is a requirement of justice that animals be given an opportunity to enter and remain within heaven. Human beings are offered an opportunity to enter and remain within heaven. Therefore, it is a requirement of justice that animals be given an opportunity to enter and remain within heaven (2017, 180).

Note here a major difference between the equality argument and, say, the beneficence argument.

The beneficence argument says that non-humans animals have a claim to immortality which, so to speak, stands on its own two feet (or four or six or eight, or whatever the case may be).<sup>4</sup> From that perspective, divine justice would require animal universalism even if there were no humans.

By contrast, the equality argument claims that, because God gives humans the opportunity to obtain a blessed afterlife, God must also give such an opportunity to non-human animals. It is compatible with accepting the equality argument to say that, if God had denied humans a chance

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<sup>4</sup> Sorry.

at immortality, it would be okay to do the same to non-humans. What is bad (so far as this argument is concerned) is not allowing animals to perish *itself*, but rather allowing them to perish *while* giving humans the opportunity to escape death.

The moral principle here is essentially a “luck egalitarian” one. Luck egalitarianism--a position borne out of the literature on distributive justice--asserts, roughly, that it is unjust for one individual to be worse off than another due to factors for which they are not responsible (cf. Anderson 2010). And indeed, Hereth elsewhere (2017, 175) approvingly quotes a statement of luck egalitarianism from Larry Temkin: “It is bad—unjust and unfair—for some to be worse off than others through no fault of their own.” However, there are trenchant criticisms of luck egalitarianism, including from other egalitarians. And I think the reliance on something like luck egalitarianism proves the undoing of the argument in its current state.

Suppose we start out with a distributively just situation, one where no one is worse off than another due to bad luck. As part of this situation, suppose I have some tasty and reasonably nutritious vegan cookies, ones which I am permitted to keep and eat. But I’m nice, and decide to offer a cookie to the next neighbor who passes my house. Graves et al. write that “perfect justice compels God to offer non-arbitrarily distributed opportunities” (175, fn. 36). And I have arbitrarily distributed the opportunity to get a cookie: my neighbor is no more *deserving* than anyone else because they happened to be passing by at that time, nor can anyone really be considered responsible for missing out on the opportunity, given its unforeseeable nature. (We could even make it so that my neighbor exercises *no agency at all* in being given the opportunity--maybe I pick someone I know at random from the phonebook.) So others may now be worse off than my neighbor, through no fault of their own. Have I done something even a

little unjust? Do I now have even a *pro tanto* obligation to offer a cookie to everyone who passes my house? To everyone in the phonebook? To everyone in the world?

I don't think so. Of course, if I *didn't* get offered a cookie, and I really wanted one, I might feel some resentment. But this reaction would be driven by envy, not justice. The morally correct reaction would be for me to be glad that you graciously offered one of your cookies to someone else, and happy for whoever had the opportunity to get one (cf. Anderson 2010). Of course, if, for some independent reason, you had an *obligation* to offer me one of your cookies, I might justifiably feel resentment that you didn't. But then the fact that you offered someone else a cookie wouldn't really be doing the work, and, as mentioned, the equality argument can't assume that God has an independent obligation to offer non-human animals a place in heaven, on pain of begging the question.

But isn't equality important? Of course. I believe so-called *social egalitarianism* provides a superior picture of its significance. Social egalitarians see equality as fundamentally being about, not the strictly equal distribution of well-being, but rather the existence of equal *relationships* between individuals. What they oppose is not some being luckier than others, but rather the existence of oppressive hierarchies in which some individuals are dominated, disrespected, disregarded or exploited (Anderson 2010; Crummett forthcoming b). I think this is a more philosophically attractive view, as well as one which better accords with the aims of actual egalitarian liberation movements.

Social egalitarianism will require equal treatment *of certain sorts in certain contexts*. For instance, where people with certain characteristics are already unjustly disadvantaged, discriminating on the basis of those characteristics can exacerbate existing oppression (cf.

Anderson 2013); this is at least part of why the law treats discrimination on the basis of “protected characteristics” differently. At other times, unequal treatment will constitute an insult, thereby creating, constituting, or reinforcing a degrading status hierarchy. For instance, I think a society could be just without having an institution of legal marriage. However, I think it’s unjust for a state to offer marriages to heterosexual couples but only “civil unions” to gay couples, even if the same legal rights and benefits attach to both. This is at least partly because, once the government gets into the business of giving special honorific designations to straight relationships, refusing them to gay relationships signals that the government thinks those relationships aren’t worthy of the designation, even if it wouldn’t have signaled that had the government stayed out of the honorific designation business altogether (cf. Crummett forthcoming a,b). At yet other times, a group of people have engaged in some sort of cooperative endeavor, and each has a *prima facie* claim to an equal portion of the fruits of that endeavor, however large that portion winds up being. In these cases, allowing some to claim a bigger piece of the pie can constitute a form of exploitation. Avoiding this is major reason for favoring economic equality (Crummett forthcoming b). I suspect that the intuitive appeal of the luck egalitarian premise which appears in the equality argument results from our inaccurately generalizing from the many cases where unequal treatment really is wrong.

However, this may also suggest a way forward for the equality argument. I think that plausible forms of social egalitarianism will also require that we avoid subjecting non-human animals to speciesist oppression. (For instance, factory farming, in which animals are kept in degrading and torturous conditions so that they may be more cheaply exploited for food and other products of their bodies, will clearly be ruled out, in addition to being wrong for other

reasons.) Given that social egalitarianism condemns *some* forms of unequal treatment, and given that any plausible social egalitarianism includes non-human animals, it may be that attention to the *particular* reasons why unequal treatment can be wrong will reveal that some of these reasons would also tell against God's distributing opportunities for a good afterlife on the basis of species. Of course, I would welcome this result.

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