

Language, Ethics and Animal Life

Wittgenstein and Beyond

Edited by

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What's Wrong with a Bite of Dog?

Rami Gudovitch

To many of us, the mere thought of eating a cat or a dog is outrageous; however, we can easily imagine expressing our outrage at a dinner conversation, over a burger. Does this gap between our attitudes to cats and dogs versus our attitudes to cows betray a deep inconsistency or hypocrisy on our part? This essay argues that it does not.

1. Approaches to morality

Morality is often understood as resting on an impartial approach towards moral subjects.¹ Accordingly, it is assumed that the ultimate justification of our moral principles must not rest on our likes, dislikes or other personal biases. The image of impartiality seems to stand at the very heart of the idea of morality – isn't the equal and fair applicability of moral principles to all just what morality is about? One challenge to this conception of morality is raised by the Wittgensteinian school, or at least, by some of its recent advocates. Authors such as Cora Diamond and John McDowell renounce the image of 'impartiality' as standing at the core of morality.² The aim of the present essay, along the lines of this new Wittgensteinian tradition, is to argue that human attitudes play an inextricable role in any viable conception of morality.

The proposed argument concentrates on the question of the moral status of animals. In particular, it defends the tenability of a moral view involving preferring some animals to others. But the purpose of defending the coherence of a preferentialist view towards animals is not to argue for the legitimacy of a preferential attitude to different individual humans, communities or ethnic groups. Rather, the purpose is to highlight the inextricable role our attitudes and preferences play in any form of moral reasoning.

¹ By 'impartial' I mean that, ultimately, moral justification turns to principles or rules that are general, and do not involve in their specification any reference to their holder, her attitudes or the specific characteristics of the situation involved.

² See John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 34–6; Cora Diamond, *The Realistic Spirit* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), ch. 15.

2. Attitudes to animals

Animals play a complex role in our lives. Our attitudes towards animals are full of tensions and contradictions. Different individuals and communities share some of their attitudes to animals whereas they differ in others. Many of us share many of our attitudes to farm animals, pests and pets, for example. However, some vegetarians describe the meat industry in terms commonly reserved to describe the worst human atrocities, while many carnivores simply fail to see what the fuss is about.

Such differences in people's attitudes to animals are often correlated with substantial differences in their conception of the moral status of animals. An impartialist conception of morality requires that such moral conflicts be settled on the basis of some robust factual grounds, discernible independently of one's attitudes and biases, by virtue of which a subject (human or otherwise) merits moral attention.

There are different conceptions in the philosophical literature regarding the types of facts that could serve for grounding a creature's merit for moral attention. Among the candidates are facts about the creature's sentience, its cognitive skills or its degree of rationality. But obvious counterexamples suggest that none of these candidates does justice even to our most basic moral intuitions. Octopi are claimed to have a richer set of neural sensors than dogs, and therefore are likely to be capable of suffering more extreme forms of pain; some claim that a computer has a higher degree of cognitive complexity than a cat, while some chimpanzees express more rationality in their behaviour than some unfortunate humans. Still, most of us are unlikely to find the corollary claims – for example, that chimpanzees' claim for moral attention is stronger than that of some unfortunate human beings – acceptable; such claims contradict some of our firmest beliefs about humans and their moral status.

The impartialist, on the other hand, does not find such results objectionable. She argues that since the dictates of a solid and valid moral reasoning might not coincide with all our pre-theoretical 'moral' intuitions, such conflicts are not surprising. On the contrary, in cases where such conflicts occur, we must overcome our pre-theoretical intuitions and change our judgements so that they would accord with the valid dictates of morality. The Utilitarian Peter Singer, for example, in some of his writings, defends a view according to which the commands of morality stem from the demand to respect other creatures' interests. Facts about a creature's interests, for Singer, are objective, and are independent of the concerns and attitudes others have about the creature in question, its welfare, etc. Some interests are shared by all creatures, such as the interest to avoid suffering, while other interests depend on the creature's capacities and potentialities. According to this position, moral principles and judgements must be indifferent to the concerns we happen to have for the interests of some but not of others, and concentrates on facts about interests alone.³

The Wittgensteinian objects to the impartialist proposal, arguing that morality must not be divorced – not even locally and in the interest of systemization – from the

³ See, for example, Peter Singer, *Practical Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), esp. 21.

complex network of considerations, motivations, judgements and emotions regarding who merits moral attention and when.⁴

The Wittgensteinian and the impartialist can agree that there are more aspects of the life of a creature that deserve moral attention besides its suffering. Among such aspects we can mention the creature's well-being, its autonomy and its right to self-fulfilment. However, there is a crucial difference between the significance such aspects take in the positions of the two camps. For the impartialist, the status of such interests *as* interests of a creature must be determined independently of the contingent concerns and sensitivities we have in regard to the creature. For Singer, for example, 'Our distress [about the killing of some creature] is a *side effect* of the killing, not something that makes it wrong in itself.'⁵

Singer insists that the concerns we happen to have are simply irrelevant for moral reasoning and that valid moral reasoning must limit itself to identifying others' interests. While Singer is struggling to allow that, if put to the test, he would save his daughter Naomi, and not his dog Max, *because* she is his 'lovely baby daughter',⁶ he insists that this 'because' lacks any moral value, and any valid form of justification of his choice must be given in terms of facts about her capacities and potentialities not shared by the dog. Thus, any appeal to concerns about other's interests and well-being, for Singer, is relevant to the moral question only in so far as it helps to *identify* interests that are out there, independently of such concerns. Singer cannot recognize anything but bare emotions, devoid of reason, in a position that allows the concerns we have about others to enter the description of the moral facts.⁷ For moral reasoning to be a valid case of reasoning, Singer insists, the moral significance of the circumstances in question must be cashed out independently of any contingencies about the concerns we happen to have. We can use Wittgenstein's distinction between *symptoms* and *criteria* to clarify the debate: Singer insists that our moral intuitions (of course, Singer might choose not to call them 'moral') – that is, our concerns about others' interests – are *symptoms of*, not *criteria for*, the moral value of those others and of our moral obligations towards them.⁸ The Wittgensteinian, by contrast, takes such concerns to be criteria for valid moral principles.

3. The Preferential View

We can call this Wittgensteinian conception the 'Preferential View'. According to this view, the starting point of moral reasoning is in respecting our preferences towards

⁴ See, for example, Yuval Eylon, 'Virtue and Continence,' *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*, 12 (2009), 137–51.

⁵ Peter Singer, 'Reflections,' in J. M. Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 89.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 87.

⁷ Cf. Diamond, *The Realistic Spirit*, ch. 11, where Diamond extracts the image of the nature of moral thinking underlying such a conception; see, for example, 305. Diamond addresses Singer's own conception in various essays, notably 'The Difficulty of Reality and the Difficulty of Philosophy,' in *Philosophy and Animal Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 50. See also Singer, 'Reflections,' 91.

⁸ For Wittgenstein's distinction between criteria and symptoms, see his *Philosophical Investigations*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Blackwell, 1958), §354. Cf. Singer, 'Reflections,' 89.

some over others, rather than by attempting to justify such preferences on the basis of some, supposedly, firmer grounds. What could be said in favour of such a view?

The impartialist's goal is highly ambitious, namely: to establish foundations for morality on firm, objective grounds. However, there are strong reasons to believe that this goal cannot be met, and moreover, that an attempt to meet it is doomed to result in a moral disaster. I will argue that the impartialist's craving for foundations, objectivity and neutrality could be fulfilled only at an intolerable cost – namely, the cost of our being burdened with a conception that is hardly recognizable as a conception of morality at all. To see this more clearly, we will first have to formulate in a more precise manner the challenges the impartialist presents to the preferential view.

Cora Diamond describes the impartialist (though Diamond does not use this particular term) as committed to the following picture: Human beings have natural inclinations, which are not based on reasons (they prefer cats over cows, members of their own ethnic group over members of another, etc.). Such inclinations, the impartialist holds, are no more than mere manifestations of subjective sentiments unless they are grounded in facts and general principles, which are independent of their frames of mind (or better, their frames of heart).⁹

We can make the impartialist's picture more explicit: The impartialist holds that (morally) caring for cats while unhesitatingly consuming cows is justified *only* if the following conditions are met:

Let *M* be the moral attitude in question, supposedly applying to cats (or dogs) but not to cows.

- (i) There is some feature *F* shared by cats, but not by cows.
- (ii) There is some moral principle according to which holding the moral attitude *M* towards *S* is justified if and only if *F* is a feature of *S*.¹⁰

However, the impartialist argues that there is no such feature *F*. Therefore, holding the attitude *M* towards cats but not towards cows is unjustified. Therefore the preferential view is false.

There are two distinct threats the impartialist takes the preferentialist to be vulnerable to: First, there is the threat of sentimentalism (or anthropomorphism), and hence the objection might be raised that our preferences are not sufficient for the detection of certain justified moral claims of others. It might be noted, for example, that

⁹ Diamond, *The Realistic Spirit*, 293.

¹⁰ We can add the following thesis to the impartialist's argument: (iii) It is unlikely that such a feature *F* distinguishes cats from cows. According to an influential line of argument, the reason it is unlikely is that other cultures do not share the moral attitudes we have towards cats, while they have *these very attitudes* towards cows, and vice versa. Limitations of space prevent me from dealing with this argument explicitly, but I hope the argument of the present essay suffices to show why this common claim about 'other cultures' is misguided. In any case, I believe the argument is based on a false description of the cultural differences concerning attitudes to animals. It is assumed, for example, that the special status cows have in Hinduism parallels the role pets have in many urban societies. But a better comparison of the status of cows in Hinduism is to the status of holy objects in some religions, not to that of pets.

the mere fact that *we* happened to favour some creature over others lacks any moral significance. Children, for example, often express deep concerns about the condition of their teddy bears exceeding their concerns about the well-being of their fellow friends. Such concerns have nothing to do in morally *justifying* the favouring of teddy bears over the human friends.

Secondly, there is the threat of a certain kind of moral blindness, since our preferences do not necessarily detect the moral claims of others. Possessing a given set of preferences does not necessarily equip their possessor with adequate capacities for the recognition of justified moral claims of others. Thus, preferring some to others could easily blind one to at least some of the moral claims others make upon one.

To secure ourselves from such threats, the impartialist insists that morality must be given firm grounds, independent of the tendencies of our hearts, which underlie our preferences.

4. Impartialist worries

The difficult thing here is not, to dig down to the ground; no, it is to recognize the ground that lies before us as the ground.¹¹

The first worry of the impartialist is that in relying on her own preferences an agent could lose track of morality altogether. Preferences as such, she argues, are arbitrary. We might prefer teddy bears to people, enjoy torturing the innocent, etc. In other words, preferences are simply the wrong type of things to base morality on. They do not belong to the *order of justification* – they are not the types of things that have the power to justify or to be justified.¹² The fact that we often like some people or creatures more than others is nothing but a fact about our subjective life.

This picture of preferences and other subjective states as arbitrary and lying beyond justification, however, should be discarded. One of the most influential arguments against this picture is found in Wittgenstein's passages often referred to as 'The Private Language Argument'.¹³ The upshot of Wittgenstein's argument is that the idea of the independence of a subjective realm or order of justification is incoherent. We can illustrate that by the help of a comparison which Wittgenstein makes. In *Philosophical Investigations*, §293, Wittgenstein asks the reader to imagine some community in which everyone has a box in which they keep a beetle. Now, no one is allowed to look in anyone else's box, only in his or her own. Over time, people talk about what is in their boxes and the word 'beetle' becomes a common word used in their shared

¹¹ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*, 3rd edn (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978), VI, §31.

¹² See, for example, McDowell, *Mind and World*, 29, 133–5; *The Engaged Intellect* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 249, 253. McDowell uses the image of 'the order of justification' in the context of sensory experience, but it is equally applicable to the case of 'inner experience'.

¹³ See Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §§243–315.

language. However, Wittgenstein argues that we are only under the illusion that we have successfully described a possibility here.

Wittgenstein argues that the thing in the box is neither necessary nor sufficient for the use of 'beetle' in the public language. It is not sufficient because whatever is in fact in the box – whether it is a particular object, or something that is constantly changing, or whether it is empty – the speaker's use of the term 'beetle' would refer to *that thing* (or those things, or to nothing).¹⁴ So no content would have been given to the claim that the term refers to what is in the box. A term that can refer indiscriminately to anything is not a genuine referential term. And if the term is not referential, the thing it supposedly refers to simply drops out: 'No, one can 'divide through' by the thing in the box; it cancels out, whatever it is.'¹⁵ On the other hand, whatever is supposedly in the box is not necessary for the way the term is used in public language because there is no way in which the thing in the box could play any role in the considerations governing a proper application of the term in public use. The content of the box could not contribute to the battle of considerations used in justifying or in criticizing a given application of the term. 'The thing in the box has no place in the language-game at all; not even as a *something*.'¹⁶

Now, what is true about 'beetle' in Wittgenstein's imagined community is surely true of the use of a psychological term, such as 'desire', 'preference', etc., when understood in abstraction from 'the order of justification' – that is, the different considerations, reasons, grounds and doubts users appeal to in justifying or criticizing the use of such terms in public language. But such an abstraction underlies the accusation of the impartialist. The impartialist argues that the preferentialist is committed to sentimentalism because she bases her account on mere preferences, which the impartialist holds to be purely subjective states, incapable of playing any justificatory role. But the Wittgensteinian argument shows that such a picture of preferences and other subjective contents is an illusion. It is not a picture of anything. The only reason we confusedly assume it to be a picture of content is because we are doomed to describe it with the help of terms from our shared, public language. But when this putative picture is seen to be illusory, the constituents of the mental need no longer be regarded as alien to the order of justification, and hence the basis of the impartialist's objection diminishes.

This reply to the impartialist's accusation, given here only in brief outline, should be taken with some caution. The claim that our preferences and other mental states are not alien to the order of justification should not be understood as implying that we are never prone to different errors as a result of relying on our preferences, sentiments, etc. The point is, however, that even occasions in which we fall victim to such biases do not sharply remove the attitudes we rely on from the order of justification. In referring to such cases as 'failures' it is implied that, when properly exercised, our preferences have the power to justify and to be justified. A failure or error of preference is nothing less than a failed exercise of a capacity, which is primarily a capacity to be sensitive

¹⁴ See *ibid.*, §293.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

to different patterns of justification, including ones involving common standards of moral justification.

The second of the impartialist's concerns, which I noted briefly above, is the worry that not only are our preferences not *sufficient* for morality, they are not even *necessary* for it. Resting our moral outlook on our preferences makes our moral thinking prone to the threat of ignoring some valid moral claims of others simply because they have the misfortune of not being among the creatures (human or otherwise) we happen to like. In the absence of firm objective grounds underlying our moral outlook, there is no warrant that our preferences equip us with proper sensitivities enabling us to discern what morally matters.

However, the impartialist insistence on the need for firm, 'heart-indifferent' grounds could not be met. The problem is that the idea of grounding by independent principles of morality is hardly recognizable as a case of grounding at all, even less so as a case of 'moral' grounding. The impartialist's accusation, that the cat/cow distinction (or the dog/cow distinction) falls short of supplying the necessary 'firm grounds', is based, I will argue, on an unattainable myth. To see that, let us consider a putative moral principle of the following form:

MP: We ought to minimize suffering in the world.

The principle MP supposedly grounds our attitudes towards any creature, independently of whether we care about their suffering. But it is not clear that MP could serve as a ground for any moral outlook whatsoever. The problem is that putting suffering *simpliciter* as the principle of action is forgetting why we *care* about suffering – what motivates us to aim at preventing it. As a general rule for action MP does not have, in itself, any justificatory force. Of course, the impartialist's choice to place suffering at the heart of a purported moral principle is not random – suffering is something we often *care* about, and other things being equal most of us would wish to minimize. By using the term 'suffering' we already connect the person or the creature we describe to 'what human life is' – that is, to the complex network of concerns and engagements involved in interacting with our fellow human beings.¹⁷

In describing a creature as suffering we are already placing her in a rich network of attitudes, such as wishes, hopes, beliefs, as well as related concepts such as those of pain, compassion, cruelty, etc. The concept of 'suffering' is deeply rooted in the life of a person, or of a creature, and the propriety of applying it depends on many aspects of the subject's life. The search for firm grounds, in the form of a universal principle detaches 'suffering' from such a complex network, and thus detaches it from *why we care* about suffering. The resulting purported moral principle is suggestive only because it borrows its appeal from the force the concept of 'suffering' has when entrenched within the complex idea of the life of a creature. By *endorsing* the principle MP when considered

¹⁷ Cf. Diamond, *The Realistic Spirit*, 325–6: 'The ways in which we mark what human life is belong to the source of moral life, and no appeal to the prevention of suffering which is blind to this can in the end be anything but self-destructive.'

in abstraction from the complex role 'suffering' plays in forming our judgements about and interactions with others, the principle turns into an arbitrary *cause* for action and belief-formation rather than a moral justification for action, and there is no reason to expect that the two would coincide.¹⁸

In fact, it is not even clear that what we call 'suffering' in our ordinary interaction with others is discernible from the remote point of view the impartialist recommends. The question whether particular events in the lives of a person involve suffering depends on more than the amount of pain the creature undergoes (surely, on more than the number and type of neurons triggered in her brain).

5. Attitudes versus opinions

What account can be given of the moral status of animals, once the search for a neutral perspective and for firm grounds is given up? We can recall, in this context, Wittgenstein's advice: 'don't think, but look!'¹⁹ In the context of the present discussion, the advice should be to observe carefully the characteristics of our interactions with animals, at the different types of considerations we appeal to in debating animals' moral status and at the forms of concern we direct to animals, etc.

There are many similarities, as well as striking differences, between our attention to animals and our attention to fellow human beings. (Similarly, there are many similarities and differences between our attention to some human beings versus our attention to others.) Tracing such connections allows placing morality in a general humanistic framework to which it naturally belongs, even when the subjects in question are non-human. Thus, the question of the moral status of animals is revealed to be an extension of the question of the moral status of human beings.

The attitudes involved in the ways many of us interact with and think about our dogs and cats, for example, have a deep person-like character:²⁰ a dog is often described as a loyal friend and neglecting it amounts to a betrayal; every cat has a unique character, much like humans; a dog can be happy or sad, depending on the behaviour and mood of its owner, and a cat can be jealous, much like a human child, when her owner nurses a new baby; cats and dogs are the close companions of many, and the only companions for some. Such characteristic forms of expression seem to stand at the heart of our concern and care (or at least, the concern and care some of us have) towards dogs and cats.

In Part II of the *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein writes: 'My attitude towards him is an attitude towards a soul. I am not of the *opinion* that he has a soul.'²¹

¹⁸ The impartialist, of course, is unlikely to find this objection threatening. After all, she denies the requirement that moral demands should coincide with our intuitions. When put like that, it is clear that there are here two radically conflicting conceptions of morality, a choice between which cannot be made on the basis of arguments. (I would like to thank Nora Hämäläinen for raising this point.)

¹⁹ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §66.

²⁰ Cf. Diamond, *The Realistic Spirit*, 324.

²¹ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, Part II, iv, p. 178.

The idea of 'attitudes' versus 'opinions' can be illustrated by such characteristic forms of attention to animals. We can say that Wittgenstein's proposal, when applied to the case of animals, is to look at our forms of relations to cats and dogs not as resulting from opinions or as based on hypotheses that need to be supported by evidence. Taking my dog to be a loyal companion is not an opinion I have about my dog. An opinion presupposes the truth of some hypothesis about the type of creature my dog is; but my *attitude* towards my dog cannot be refuted as though it were a hypothesis.

It is not that my attitude to my dog cannot be challenged, but the sorts of considerations that would challenge taking my dog to be a loyal companion are of a piece with the typical considerations involved in doubting that someone is a loyal companion.²² Such considerations might include, for example, evidence such as: 'she betrayed me', or 'she doesn't really care about me at all', as when I learn that my dog is indifferent to my absence or presence as long as there is someone around her. Of course, not *all* such forms of expression are applicable to dogs, but that does not mean that the grounds that could make me stop taking my dog to be a loyal companion are of a substantially different form from the grounds that typically make us stop taking a human friend to be loyal.

Yet there are also considerations that could influence us in the case of dogs that are more peculiar to the case and that would not apply to human beings. For example, a loner, who never succeeded in finding trust in people might find a true human friend, one day, and feel it is only now he understands what 'true friend' really means. He might realize that while his dog was a great comfort to his loneliness, it was nothing like a true friend. But even this case could hardly be described as a *discovery* of some fact underlying a true friendship that is absent in the case of dogs. In fact, we can similarly imagine someone who by finding a true friend and learning of the true virtues of friendship, realizes that he never had a true human friend before, though he always took himself to have many.²³

6. Pets and persons

When we say we don't eat pets, for example (or that we don't kill prisoners), we imply something about who *we* are – rather than about what is *right* for any being in the cosmos to do under any possible circumstances, as a result of some firm moral principle. It is not that we believe that for others it is *right* to kill prisoners or to eat pets. Rather, referring to some people as 'prisoners' and to some animals as 'pets' is already making the first step in placing them within a complex network

²² In that sense, we should be cautious of reading Wittgenstein's distinction between opinions and attitudes as an attempt to demarcate a sharp dichotomy. It should not be concluded from stating that *I am not of the opinion that you have a soul* that the attitudes I take towards you as a human being are insensitive to the influence of a variety of beliefs, opinions and hypotheses, and that they could not be revised in different ways.

²³ Niklas Forsberg suggested that we can also imagine the reversed case, of a man who came to think that he has never had a real friend in his whole life, until he got a dog.

of relations to various beliefs, values, practices, etc., relations that already carry various implications about how we think they should be treated. Calling an animal a 'pet' is already making some person-like comparisons, and placing it in a position that excludes it from the food chain, making the idea of eating it rather grotesque.²⁴

The way to put it is not that, first, we recognize some independent *similarity* – some common features shared by humans and pets, describable from the perspective of the 'cosmic exile'²⁵ and in light of which the 'person' vocabulary is applicable to pets – and *then* we are justified in treating pets in a manner similar to that in which we treat people.²⁶ Diamond illustrates this point by saying:

A pet is not something to eat, it is given a name, is let into our houses and may be spoken to in ways in which we do not normally speak to cows or squirrels. That is to say, it is given some part of the character of a person.²⁷

It is crucial that it is *we* who *give* pets this person-like status. However, giving pets such a status is not something we choose to do, something we could willingly have chosen not to do. Rather, it is a result of the fact that we *grasp the behaviour of dogs and cats and our interactions with them under a person-like mode of presentation*. Hence, there is no need to demand a general justification for ascribing a human-like character to some pets. It is, rather, that some animals take particular roles in our social and private lives, and such roles make the human analogies apt. Denying that there is a need for justification does not mean that there is nothing 'right' about taking some animals to have a human-like character. Recall Wittgenstein's words in *Philosophical Investigations*, §289: 'To use a word without a justification does not mean to use it without right.' In other words, applying the human vocabulary to pets is not based on *another* justification besides the fact that such a vocabulary comes naturally to us, given the role such animals play in our lives and the forms of interaction that we have with them.

²⁴ Possibly, there is room to make some distinctions within the general category of 'a pet'. The case of some pets, and in particular dogs and cats, is peculiar because dogs and cats are the types of creatures that often can play this human-like role. Rabbits, hamsters and iguanas can play it to a lesser extent. But it must be emphasized that the argument of the present essay also shows that there is no non-question begging answer to the question what must be true of a creature, so that it could be subject to this more complex 'human-like' attention and participate in such unique forms of interaction.

²⁵ I borrow this expression from John McDowell, 'Anti-Realism and the Epistemology of Understanding' [1981], reprinted in his *Mind, Knowledge, and Reality* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 330. McDowell himself borrows it from W. V. O. Quine, *Word and Object* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1960), 275.

²⁶ Compare the thesis that there is no fact of the matter that justifies saying that a person's behaviour (described from the 'cosmic exile') is a case of adding rather than of quadding. (This formulation of Wittgenstein's problem is influenced by 'Wittgenstein on Following a Rule,' in John McDowell, *Mind, Value and Reality* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 221. Of course, 'quadding' is defined by Saul Kripke in *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), 9.)

²⁷ Diamond, *The Realistic Spirit*, 324.

We think about and interact with some animals in ways that share many aspects of the ways we think of and interact with our fellow human beings. Maybe the most important manifestation of such a human-like grasp of some non-human creatures is that it enables us to empathize with a creature – to see many aspects of its life, its suffering, its interactions with other creatures, etc., as meaningful events in a life; though much simpler than a human life, still sharing enough with it so that we can understand it and relate to it.²⁸ This ability to relate to the other's life is essential to our grasp of other human beings, though such ability could degenerate, as with a racist that fails to see some other as a fellow human being. But that is precisely the sense in which it makes sense to say that, at least in some cases, a racist approach to others is misguided: it consists of a *failure* – the failure to grasp others in the same rich spectrum of sensitivities in which we grasp other human beings. In this case, as in the case of animals, talking about 'failure' versus 'success' does not mean that there is a justification that the racist failed to recognize. The racist is not making a *factual* mistake about some common feature shared by those she is racist towards and those to whom she is not. *Given* our approach to the family of human beings, that includes all races and genders, and to a lesser extent some animals, we can say that the racist approach involves a moral failure – the failure to exercise some of the sensitivities that are characteristic of a moral approach to others.

Grasping a situation involving some creature under person-like concepts is grasping it as holding various relations to reasons, motivations, beliefs, etc. If we *see* a fly trying to fly out of the window – that is, if we already grasp the situation *that way* – then, by this token, we can understand a motivation someone might have to open the window and let it out. It is not that we must share this motivation, but rather, grasping this motivation of someone enables us to recognize a reason for letting the fly out, even if we are not motivated by this reason. In grasping it, suddenly, we can understand what it means to have such a motivation; the statement ascribing the motivation to the individual concerned will not strike us as a sheer piece of nonsense. Recognizing and even sharing the motivation to let the fly out does not mean that we made a first step in formulating a new general rule for action, such as 'Let out anybody trying to leave the room'; it is rather that there is now a *comparison* we find apt. By accepting the comparison, we are committing ourselves (or better, we find ourselves committed) to various links, connections, motivations, etc. Thus, if someone is in sadistic mood

²⁸ In his recent monograph, *Love and Death* (Milan: Silvana Editoriale, 2010), the Japanese photographer Nobuyoshi Araki documents the last days in the life of his beloved cat Chiro. In this set of images Araki is nearly repeating the compositions of the images in his *Sentimental Journey, Winter Journey* (Tokyo: Shinchosha, 1991), a work documenting the last days in the life of his wife, 20 years earlier (Chiro was already a central figure in the early work). Fascinatingly, the images of the cat's suffering revive the suffering of Yoko, Araki's wife, in the earlier work. The young Yoko's sadness and pain, and the difficulty of the spectator to find in it anything but a remote loneliness, suddenly gains new heartbreaking force in the form of the explicit facial expressions of the helpless cat, pleading for some comfort from the photographer – his loving companion – Araki. It is possible that the view of some observers (myself included) of the work is limited as they simply miss some of the facial nuances and conventions of expressions of emotions manifested by Yoko. This, I believe, is an interesting case, in which the image of the cat enables at least some viewers to see the human in an even more human-like manner than she otherwise could have done.

she might open the window and close it just before the fly escapes; she might find it funny, while there would be nothing funny (or if there were, it would be funny in a very different way) if it had been a leaf blowing in the wind and hitting the window. Closing the window just before a leaf hits it would have been a very different game.

7. Back to the everyday

The aim of this essay has not been to convince anybody that cats and dogs can be one's friends, companions or sometimes part of one's family. Neither has it been to find any fault in someone's decision to let her cow sleep on her lap while watching TV. Asking for a justification for not eating cats is wrongheaded. A cat is a pet and we don't eat pets, and we certainly don't eat a friend, not even someone else's friend. This is not a consequence of a general independent moral principle. Someone who understands the comparison between cats and friends but demands additional moral grounds for not eating cats is probably best characterized, not as a sceptic, but as morally evil or, at least, heartless.

'What *we* do' (in philosophy), says Wittgenstein, 'is to bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use.'²⁹ We can think of the use of 'morality' in the sense of the search for firm grounds, from a heart-indifferent point of view, as a case of what Wittgenstein refers to as a 'metaphysical use' of an expression. The problem with a metaphysical use of an expression is not that in using expressions in such a way we express a special type of meaning, a *metaphysical* meaning. Rather, the problem is that such uses commonly involve the pretence of reaching a deeper, underlying sense of the expression when, in fact, all that is achieved is the use of the expression in a more precise, but at the same time also a more limited and technical, way – ignoring many aspects of its common use.

So, we should take the advice 'to bring a word back to its everyday use' as the advice to remind ourselves of other legitimate common uses of an expression that are left out by the pretence to give the expression a well-defined use. We can think of the impartialist as such a metaphysician – one who insists on reserving the term 'morality' for the context of impartiality. The argument above shows the limitation of such a proposal. It shows that limiting 'morality' to such a context renders it unrecognizable as anything worthy of being called 'morality'.

What type of uses are the sources of the temptation to identify morality with a crippled, metaphysical use? I believe the answer should be found in the idea that morality should save us from the weaknesses of our hearts. There are, in our lives, many occasions on which we are blind, biased, distorted, perverted, racist, chauvinist, etc. And these occasions, when our hearts fail to see the other as a human, are those in relation to which it is tempting to conceive of morality as a realm of the heart-indifferent – a detached and general outlook. It is these occasions which make us

²⁹ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §116.

believe that any use of our heart in moral reasoning is a moral failure. This temptation to conflate morality with impartiality is ironically mocked in Oscar Wilde's *An Ideal Husband*, where Mrs Cheveley declares: 'Morality is simply the attitude we adopt towards people whom we personally dislike.'³⁰ The purpose of the present essay has not been to vindicate Mrs Cheveley's exaggerated statement. Rather, it has been to show that the extreme position expressed in that statement can be avoided without succumbing to impartialism; that is, without underestimating the vital role that preferences play in our moral lives, with people and with animals.³¹

³⁰ Oscar Wilde, *An Ideal Husband* [1895]. See *Collected Works of Oscar Wilde* (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 1997), 630.

³¹ I would like to thank Yuval Eylon, Dalia Dray, Alice Cray and the editors of this volume for their helpful comments which improved this essay greatly. I also want to thank the Philosophy Department at the University of Haifa and Haifa Center for German and European Studies for their generous support that enabled me to dedicate my time to the research.