# *Ethical Veganism, Virtue Ethics, and the Great Soul* by Carlo Alvaro (review)


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idea of precisely what other animals we are engaging, and how, and why.

The fault may be Gilmour's, or, perhaps more likely, it may be Lewis's. How important are other animals to Lewis's spiritual perspective? While Gilmour asks this question, I am not sure how fully he answers it. Perhaps he is not sure, and again, perhaps this is inherent in his source material: Lewis "admits he does not have the answers to all questions animals present us" (p. 63)—which could explain Gilmour's similar tentativeness.

As animal-friendly as the author was, Gilmour explains, he left anthropocentric biases unchallenged. In the Narnia books, for example, Gilmour notes that "the moral status of talking animals is contingent on their relationships both to Aslan and Narnia's rightful, human dominion-bearers" (p. 116). Animals maintain their importance only if they submit to human leaders. There are nonspeaking animals in Narnia as well, to whom Lewis accords some dignity, but those animals will not ascend to the Narnian "heaven."

Lewis's 1945 novel *That Hidden Strength* has much to say about animals, but again Gilmour doesn't really milk the text all that much: Heroes treat animals compassionately, and villains are cruel to them; the antagonists are vivisectionists (destroyed by animals who escape from the laboratories). It's a starting point, but it leaves me wanting more.

As I find myself unable to extract a solid, graspable theology of animals in this study, Gilmour reiterates Lewis's own vagueness on the subject: "God's reasons for creating animals remain a mystery for Lewis," he writes, though "he insists they reveal something to us of the nature of God" (p. 128). This is fine as far as it goes, but I wish that either Lewis or, in his stead, Gilmour, might have pushed this inquiry further to explore *what* about the nature of God can be learned from attending to animals.

Lewis "makes useful, even if imperfect contributions to Christian conversations about animals" (p. 7). Finally, Gilmour seems satisfied with the "mystery" that Lewis cultivates, and indeed Lewis's devoted readers may well cherish a sense of mystery that doesn't necessarily lead to resolution, at least not within the boundaries of the texts themselves. Gilmour suggests, at the end of this book, that perhaps a richly engaging mystery is enough, and unresolved mysteries may encourage readers to perform our own contemplations, which would lead us to deliberate and discover some deeper insights about human-animal relations for ourselves.

In *Surprised by Joy*, Lewis writes that his conversion to Christianity comes as he was walking en route to the zoo, which Gilmour counts as another point demonstrating Lewis's love of animals. I write about zoos myself (disapprovingly), and I would not be inclined to consider Whipsnade Zoo, as Lewis does, a place of revelation, a sanctified space, "almost Eden come again" (p. 47). Perhaps that disagreement underlies my resistance to this book: I have different ethical approaches to animals—and more fervently strident ones—than Lewis does.

*Ethical Veganism, Virtue Ethics, and the Great Soul*. By Carlo Alvaro. (London, England: Lexington Books, 2019. 185 pp. Hardback. $95.00 ISBN: 978-1-4985-9001-3.)

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This book has two principal aims. First, the author defends ethical veganism against both meat eating and vegetarianism. And second, the author defends virtue ethics, not as a supplement to utilitarianism and

Kantianism (or rights theory), but as a replacement for these two dominant theories.

The four major virtues that are relevant to the defense of veganism, Alvaro argues, are temperance, compassion, fairness, and magnanimity (or great soul-ness, as found in the book's title). These virtues, he thinks, when supplemented by care ethics and feminist ethics, counteract the devastating flaws of consequentialist and deontological views, even when these latter are found in thinkers like Peter Singer, Tom Regan, and Christine Korsgaard. The two biggest positive influences on Alvaro seem to be Aristotle and Rosalind Hursthouse (but curiously not Stephen R. L. Clark).

Alvaro's main criticism of Kant with respect to animals is that even to have indirect duties to animals, as Kant affirms, presupposes that there are some objective characteristics of animals by virtue of which our mistreating them makes it more likely that we will mistreat human beings. *Why* does cruelty to animals translate into cruelty to human beings? Alvaro rightly asks. Further, if cruelty to animals did not lead to cruelty to human beings, it would seem on Kant's view to be permissible to inflict any number of atrocities on animals. It might be asked, but what about followers of Kant like Regan and Korsgaard, who view animals as ends in themselves? Although Alvaro agrees with Regan that an animal is a subject-of-a-life, he thinks that Regan's view is unpersuasive because it is based on wrong assumptions (but which?) and because Regan thinks that moral obligations do not admit of degrees. That is, Alvaro thinks that it is a mistake to think that an animal has the same value as a human being.

Despite the historical achievements of utilitarians vis-à-vis animals, Alvaro is very critical of all versions of utilitarian morality, including Singer's preference utilitarianism, which is often seen as improving on previous versions of utilitarian theory. What Alvaro finds objectionable is the idea that human beings and animals are disposable; their value consists not in who they are, but in their contributions to aggregate utility. Further, utilitarians discount in a problematic way moral motives, and both utilitarians and deontologists discount moral feeling, in general. Mr. Spock from *Star Trek* should not be our moral exemplar, Alvaro argues in a Bernard Williams–like manner.

One very interesting feature of Alvaro's view is his use of Cora Diamond's 1978 article "Eating Meat and Eating People." We do not eat people because we just do not regard them as food (even when they are dead and can experience no pain and when their rational autonomy is not violated; nor do we eat amputated limbs). Likewise, we do not eat companion animals because we do not regard them as food. Alvaro thinks that we should not regard *any* animals as food.

One might suspect that Alvaro would be a defender of what has been called the argument from marginal cases. But his approach to this argument is unclear. At times it seems that he is opposed to this argument *simpliciter*. This is because he thinks we should judge moral status not in terms of individual cases, but in terms of the *type* of animal in question. At other times it seems that he is opposed to this argument when it is used by utilitarians, which leaves an ambiguity regarding whether it is the argument from marginal cases that is criticized or utilitarianism or both. Unfortunately, Alvaro does not clarify matters by examining the uses of the argument from marginal cases by deontologists like Regan and by fellow virtue ethicists going back to Porphyry in the ancient period.

The insufficiency of utilitarianism and deontology for issues in animal ethics is due primarily to lack of attention in these theo-

ries to familial and social and other *relationships*, on the one hand, and lack of attention to *moral character*, on the other. Alvaro does not explore the possibility that virtue ethics could be a worthwhile supplement to these other moral theories, but rather tries to show that virtue ethics can work as a stand-alone theory without the help of these other theories. That is, one could agree with Alvaro that animal ethicists need virtue without the extravagant hypothesis that utilitarianism and deontology (and the concept of animal *rights*) can be discarded. Nor does Alvaro say much about why there is such a difference of opinion regarding animals among virtue ethicists themselves (Aristotle himself—in contrast to his student, Theophrastus, and others in the virtue ethics tradition—would certainly not be seen as a hero in the field of animal ethics). Further, Alvaro thinks that the main reason why virtue ethics was largely ignored in the modern period was due to the fact that it was misunderstood. On all of these issues one wishes to hear more from Alvaro.

One of the best features of this book is that it offers very helpful summaries and references to scientific literature in favor of vegetarian and/or vegan diets, which Alvaro helpfully interprets in light of the virtues of temperance and compassion. Throughout the book, Alvaro exhibits an admirable intellectual honesty by stating possible criticisms of his views, and he responds to such criticisms in a fair manner. Another strength of the book is its thought-provoking treatment of cultured meat grown in laboratories that does not involve animal suffering (or at least involves less suffering than occurs at present in the meat industry). Alvaro rightly wonders whether developing cultured meat is analogous to reinstituting slavery without the suffering.

Overall I think this is a very good book that is essential reading for two types of reader: those who are interested in the case for veganism (in contrast to both meat eating and vegetarianism) and those who are interested in virtue ethics, although I am not convinced by Alvaro's claim that utilitarians and deontologists necessarily deny the importance of character.

*Our Symphony with Animals: On Health, Empathy, and Our Shared Destinies*. By Aysha A. Aktar. (New York, NY: Pegasus Books, 2019. 299 + xvii pp. Paper. $27.95. ISBN 978-1-64313-070-5.)

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The human ego is an intriguing lens through which we humans view the world. Seldom do we step outside the comforting confines of our own perspective and dare to see things through the eyes of another. Dr. Akhtar invites readers to do just that, yet in doing so, she asks much of her audience, for this is not an easy read. Akhtar's book is personal, and this is what makes it unique, but also raw and alarming. It is a book about individual healing and the healing of our relationship with nonhuman animals. This book suggests means by which to heal the divide between nonhuman animals and humans, but also those that exist in intrahuman relationships. These relationships are examined through the eyes of a doctor addressing her own abuse and that of the companion who walked alongside her, enduring his own violence inflicted upon him by humans. They are further examined through the bonds forged between inmates and an aquarium of fish, through the recounting of a murderer's childhood empathy toward nonhuman animals, and through the eyes of those who have sacrificed their own bodies to protect women and children from abuse.

Just as acts of violence seldom arise or-