Animal Ethics Based on Friendship: An Aristotelian Perspective

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Abstract: This article examines Aristotle's views concerning the possibility of friendship between human beings and nonhuman animals. The suggestion that he denies this possibility is rejected. I reassess the textual evidence adduced by scholars in support of this reading, while adding new material for discussion. Central to the traditional reading is the assumption that animals, in Aristotle's view, cannot be friends in virtue of their cognitive limitations. I argue that Aristotle's account of animal cognition is perfectly consistent with the possibility of friendship between human beings and nonhuman animals.

Key words: Aristotle's ethics, friendship, animal cognition, Aristotle's biology, animal friendship

I

In recent years, this journal has become the main venue for a stimulating debate on the possibility of animal ethics based on friendship. The question was first raised by Barbro Fröding and Martin Peterson (2011a), who received a critical response from Mark Rowlands (2011) in the same journal issue. In the second issue of the *Journal of Animal Ethics* published that year, Fröding and Peterson (2011b) wrote a short but eloquent reply to Rowlands where they addressed some of his main objections. Finally, in a more recent article published 3 years ago also in this journal, Mark Causey (2019) revived the debate, siding with Rowlands on some issues but also adding new criticisms to Fröding and Peterson's original article.

At the center of the discussion stands Aristotle's account of friendship. This makes this debate all the more valuable and opportune, as it forces us to look at aspects of the Aristotelian conception of friendship—in particular, whether he allows for the possibility of friendship between nonhuman animals and human beings—which have been widely neglected by traditional Aristotle scholarship.[1] Unfortunately, Aristotle's account of friendship has been seriously misconstrued by all parties, vitiating the very basis of the debate

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as a result. The interpretation of certain Aristotelian texts is misleading, a comprehensive understanding of his theory is lacking, and some central ideas ascribed to Aristotle by these scholars are not faithful to his own position. The consensus has it that Aristotle does not allow for the possibility of friendship between human beings and nonhuman animals. However, a more careful reading of the textual evidence available reveals that Aristotle does accept that human beings and other animals can establish certain forms of friendship.

The overall structure of my argument proceeds as follows: I begin in section II with a brief outline of the debate, drawing special attention to the use that these scholars make of Aristotle's notion friendship for various argumentative purposes. In section III, I turn to Aristotle's treatment of friendship as presented in his ethical and biological works, restricting the analysis to those aspects of his account that are relevant to the debate. Finally, in section IV, I conclude with some brief remarks on the relationship between animal cognition and friendship in Aristotle's thought. Common to all the parties in the discussion is the assumption that Aristotle denies that we can befriend nonhuman animals due to their inferior cognitive capacities.

II

In their first contribution to the debate, Fröding and Peterson (2011a) made a case for the possibility of friendship between animals and humans from a roughly Aristotelian perspective, which is eventually used, as we shall see, against Aristotle's own doctrine. The gist of their argument is this: If we accept Aristotle's view that "our moral obligations toward friends differ from those toward strangers" (Fröding & Peterson, 2011a, p. 59), and if we grant, further, the (supposedly un-Aristotelian) claim that human beings and (some) animals can indeed be friends, then it naturally follows that we have certain moral obligations toward those specific animals who are our friends—this line of reasoning applies specifically to farmed animals rather than free-living animals.[2]

What are the details of this debate? After distinguishing three kinds of friendships in light of Aristotle's ethical theory—friendship based on mutual admiration, friendship based on mutual pleasure, and friendship based on mutual advantage (Fröding & Peterson, 2011a, p. 60)—Fröding and Peterson (2011a) provide further arguments in support of their claim that nonhuman animals and human beings can become friends at least on the basis of mutual advantage. They point out that this carries important moral implications for our treatment of (some) nonhuman animals since friendships of mutual advantage are enough to generate moral obligations toward friends. Crucially, however, they also believe that this possibility is explicitly ruled out by Aristotle himself (Fröding & Peterson, 2011a, p. 63), to the extent that their argument is presented from the beginning as a "challenge" to the Aristotelian account (Fröding & Peterson, 2011a, p. 59). The main rationale for their reading is that animals, by Aristotle's lights, are not endowed with the sort of complex cognitive capacities that are required for cultivating friendships of mutual advantage. More precisely, they take Aristotle to hold that animals lack the capacities to communicate and

interact with each other, capacities that are essential for cultivating friendships based on mutual advantage (Fröding & Peterson, 2011a, pp. 63 and 65).

One preliminary difficulty of this reading is that it entails ascribing to Aristotle a somewhat implausible view—namely, that Aristotle, or any other sensible thinker for that matter, denies that animals have the capacity to "interact" with each other. Common sense aside, whatever we take "interaction" to mean in this context, this is obviously not compatible, for example, with Aristotle's insistence that animals other than humans are also political by nature (Aristotle, 1965, p. 488a7–8; 1991, p. 589a1–2; 1998; pp. 1253a7–9; Depew, 1995). But let us be charitable and assume that Fröding and Peterson (2011a) are not asking us to treat "interaction" and "communication" as two different cognitive capacities but rather as expressions of one and the same capacity: that which is required to interact by communicating. Aristotle, so the argument goes, refuses to accept that animals have such a capacity—I shall return to this point in section IV. Fortunately, recent findings in cognitive ethology teach us that Aristotle was wrong in this regard. Some animals other than humans do have the required psychological makeup to establish friendships based on mutual advantage (Fröding & Peterson, 2011a, pp. 63–65). Therefore, they conclude, we can still draw upon Aristotle's theory of friendship as a basic ethical framework in order to reach the conclusion that we can befriend (some) animals—which means that we have certain moral obligations toward them—but only if we are willing to combine that framework with fresh empirical evidence coming from modern biology.

Does this argument stand up? Rowlands (2011) does not think so. The most penetrating of his objections is leveled at the logical structure of Fröding and Peterson's (2011a) reasoning. If successful at all, he argues, all that their argument shows is that we have moral obligations toward animals *provided that we are friends with them*. Nonetheless, we have no obligation at all to become friends with them—or with anyone else—in the first place. An obligation of this kind would actually contradict the very nature of friendship understood as a voluntary and unconstrained social bond. It is for this reason, Rowlands (2011) observes, that friendship can only give rise to conditional obligations rather than categorical ones (p. 73). That is to say, only *if* A is friend of B can we infer that A has certain obligations toward B as a friend. Ultimately, he concludes, Fröding and Peterson's failure to notice this distinction is the result of a faulty inference of theirs from a "is-statement" to an "ought-statement" (Rowlands, 2011, p. 72).

This substantial point of dissension notwithstanding, Rowlands (2011) openly concedes that "F&P [*i.e.*, Fröding and Peterson] are correct in their assessment of Aristotle's general attitude toward animals. I shall accept, that is, that Aristotle denies the possibility of human-animal friendship" (p. 71). He grants, moreover, some broader claims that Fröding and Peterson make about Aristotle's conception of friendship. In particular, he accepts that Aristotle does indeed identify three types of friendship in his ethics and that for Aristotle only friendship based on the mutual admiration of character is friendship in the proper sense. He also subscribes to the "inclusive interpretation" (Rowlands, 2011, p. 74) of Aristotle's account of friendship adopted by Fröding and Peterson (2011a, pp. 61–62). Conforming to this interpretation, friendships built upon the reciprocation of

pleasure or advantage, though certainly inferior to friendships of character, do deserve the name of "friendship" after all. Sadly, Rowlands concludes, the fact remains that even this inclusive interpretation of Aristotle's philosophy of friendship is unable to make room for friendship with nonhuman animals.

While this line of thought may at first glance look like a simple restatement of Fröding and Peterson's (2011a) initial position, at one point of the argument Rowlands (2011) intimates that Aristotle was committed to this view not only because animals are deprived of the complex cognitive apparatus that make such forms of friendship possible, as suggested by Fröding and Peterson (2011a), but rather because *our* attitudes toward animals, as reported by Aristotle, simply preclude this possibility. Thus, in commenting on a passage of the *Nicomachean Ethics* (Aristotle, 2000, pp. 1161a35–b5) where we learn that we cannot become friends with an ox, a horse, or a slave on the grounds that we have nothing in common with such "tools with soul," Rowlands (2011) notes:

> If you are the sort of an individual who, by your nature, cannot feel admiration for the other, and who, in your nature, cannot derive pleasure from the other's company, then how are you committed to treating that other individual? You are, it seems, incapable of treating the other as anything other than a tool. (p. 76)

As it stands, Rowlands's (2011) reasoning is an evident non sequitur. In general, from the fact that Peter cannot feel any admiration toward Smith, nor can he derive any pleasure from Smith's company, we cannot conclude that Peter is "incapable of treating the other as anything other than a tool." But Rowlands's general point is, I think, relatively clear and even plausible. As long as you regard the other to be a mere instrument or tool, which is what Aristotle seems to think about animals and slaves in this passage, no friendship can emerge—I shall return to this passage below.

I take this argument to offer an *additional* consideration against the possibility of friendship with nonhuman animals in Rowlands's (2011) interpretation of Aristotle. Later on, he will argue that, according to Aristotle, animals are indeed deprived of the cognitive capacities required to enter higher forms of friendship such as those that are built on the mutual admiration of character—to be more precise, they lack the capacity for reflective thinking (Rowlands, 2011, p. 77). Because they lack the *capacity* to establish such bonds, nonhuman animals can only aspire to relationships based on mutual advantage. The crucial point, he argues, is that such *relationships* do not qualify as *friendships* of mutual advantage in view of Aristotle's demanding moral standards. This is the stage of the argument, Rowlands continues, where Fröding and Peterson (2011a) get things wrong in their overall assessment of Aristotle's philosophy of friendship. They fail to recognize that Aristotle is operating a more subtle way of thinking. For such associations to be friendship of mutual advantage, it is necessary that the parties involved are at least *capable* of superior forms of friendship in virtue of their more sophisticated cognitive capacities. To the extent that animals lack these capacities, they are not even capable of establishing such friendships, and hence they are not in a position to take part in lesser forms of friendship either, including of course

those that arise from mutual advantage. When it comes to human beings, by contrast, even those relationships that are based *exclusively* on mutual advantage can be genuine manifestations of lesser kinds of friendship (Rowlands, 2011, p. 76). This follows from the fact that humans are at least capable of establishing friendships of character thanks to their more advanced cognitive faculties. It is worth noticing that Rowlands himself does not adhere to this supposedly Aristotelian view, contending instead, against Fröding and Peterson (2011a; but also Aristotle), that human friendships with animals can be based on pleasure and even on the mutual admiration of character. The last section of his article elaborates on how exactly this may be possible (Rowlands, 2011, pp. 76–79).

Finally, in the most recent contribution to this debate, Causey (2019) restates this general interpretation of Aristotle's conception of friendship. Despite his criticisms of Fröding and Peterson's (2011a) broader thesis mentioned earlier (see note 2), he also agrees with their overall interpretation of Aristotle's thought. In his own words: "It is a fundamental misunderstanding of the relationship between a farmer and her ox (or cow) to think that any sort of friendship, even Aristotle's friendship of utility, is possible" (Causey, 2019, p. 2). Once again, the main evidence in favor of this construal is the passage from the *Nicomachean Ethics* where friendship with "living tools" such as oxen and slaves is apparently denied (Aristotle, 2000, p. 1161a35–b5). On the basis of this passage, Causey additionally identifies a close connection between Aristotle's beliefs about slavery and his beliefs about the moral status of animals (or the absence of any such thing in his ethical theory). This connection also provides Causey with a suitable model to portray our current treatment of animals. On this model, farmed animals are basically "slaves with souls" (Causey, 2019, p. 2), or simply "tools" or "property" of the farmer, who sets himself up as their true "master." To conceive such relationships as instances of friendships, he reminds us, seems to be an improper use of language that Aristotle himself would not condone.

Before we move on to the next section, two considerations about this specific passage from the *Nicomachean Ethics* are in order. First, strictly speaking, the text only states that one cannot be friend of a slave *qua* slave, immediately adding that one can still befriend a slave *qua* human being (Aristotle, 2000, p. 1161b4–6). The assertion is puzzling but pivotal, as it allows for the existence of friendships with individuals who are slaves, although under a different description of who, or what, they are (whatever that means). Similar considerations apply to Aristotle's view about our relationships with other animals: While we cannot be friends with an ox *qua* "tool," this leaves open whether we can befriend the ox *qua* animal (Rowlands, 2011, p. 71). Second, it also proves suggestive that, humans aside, the only two animals who are mentioned in this passage are an ox and a horse (Aristotle, 2000, p. 1161b2–3. Crisp's translation, without any support in the manuscripts, omits the horse, which leads Rowlands, 2011, p. 71, to believe, wrongly, that "the only animal cited is the ox"). Hence, even if no friendship at all were possible with *these* species, this would still provide no sufficient grounds for concluding that friendship with other animals is not possible according to Aristotle. As we shall see in the next

section, a conclusion like this is not consistent with several passages in Aristotle's works where the possibility of such a friendship is duly acknowledged.

III

Is this a faithful reconstruction of Aristotle's views? As far as the interpretation of his account of friendship is concerned, I shall focus on four specific theses that are attributed to him by these scholars:

[T1] Aristotle distinguishes three types of friendship: some are based on the mutual admiration of character, some on mutual pleasure, and others on mutual advantage (also "utility").

[T2] Aristotle thinks that character friendships are the paradigmatic case, but this does not prevent him from conceding that, despite their inferiority, the other two kinds are also expressions of friendship.

[T3] Aristotle holds that friendships of any type generate special moral obligations toward friends.

[T4] Whatever kind of friendship we consider (as stated in [T1]), animals cannot be friends with human beings. This thesis therefore includes friendships based on mutual advantage.

Let me begin by indicating what I take to be fairly uncontroversial about this list. I have in mind [T3] that is brought out by Fröding and Peterson (2011a) as a key move in their argument. That friendship generates special moral obligations toward some people is of course a highly controversial claim in modern moral philosophy (see Bernstein, 2007; Friedman, 1993; Sherman, 1987), but that Aristotle thought so indeed is not (e.g., Aristotle, 2000, pp. 1159b32–1160a8). In contrast, neither [T1] nor [T2] are straightforward. If only for the sake of argument, since all the parties to the discussion seem to accept them without many reservations, I shall also take them for granted. Although neither is essential to my argument, which centers on [T4] instead, philosophical rigor demands, however, some important clarifications about each of them.

For a start, it is a moot point whether the mutual admiration of character is, in Aristotle's eyes, the distinctive mark of friendship "in the proper sense" (Aristotle, 2000, p. 1157a30–31, 1156b34, 2013, pp. 1236b2). If he does not think so, at least some aspects of [T1] and [T2] would call for some revision. Often, when he sorts friendships into three classes, the most perfect kind of friendship is said to be built upon virtue or moral goodness: "Perfect friendship is that of good people, those who are alike in their virtue" (Aristotle, 2000, p. 1156b7–8; compare Aristotle, 2000, pp.1157a18–19 and 1157b25, 1158a1 and 1158b5–11). Because the mutual admiration of character *need not* presuppose the existence of virtue, it is disputable whether friendships of character should be deemed equivalent to virtuous friendships. This reading was made popular by Cooper (1977) several decades ago in a seminal article that was clearly influential for Fröding and Peterson (2011a, p. 62). Cooper's claim is that Aristotle does not consider it a requisite for

people to be perfectly virtuous agents in order to become friends of character. A message of hope, for sure. Yet even Cooper (1977) himself is forced to admit, perhaps reluctantly, that "one should not, however, overlook the significance of the fact that Aristotle himself prefers to characterize the central type of friendship by concentrating almost exclusively on the friendship of perfectly good men" (p. 629). With this clarification in place, let me make clear that I have no intentions of engaging with this parallel debate here. Suffice it to point out that the issue is not uncontroversial and that we should not take it for granted without further inspection.

More important for present purpose is [T2]. Evidently, if [T2] is false, and friendships of mutual advantage and pleasure are not instances of friendship properly speaking, then even if we grant that human and nonhuman animals are capable of establishing relationships based on mutual advantage, such relationships would not qualify, by definition, as friendship in Aristotelian terms. The implication of this is that Fröding and Peterson's (2011a) argument could no longer be supported, at the ethical level, by a reference to Aristotle's account of friendship. The reason is simple. In this case, what prevents us from characterizing such relationships as genuine manifestations of friendship is not that the parties involved are simply incapable of having such relationships as a consequence of their cognitive differences, but rather that, however intelligent they may be, it is in the very nature of the relationship itself to be something other than friendship. Now it is worth emphasizing that, for the same reason, if [T2] is false, then the impossibility of friendship between human and nonhuman animals would not be a matter of the cognitive differences of animals in particular; given Aristotle's (2000) admittedly high moral standards, most *human* relationships would also fall short of it, and only a very few human beings could become truly friends (pp. 1156b24–25).

Aristotle's own view is oscillating. He says, for example, that friendships of mutual advantage or pleasure are friendships "only by resemblance" (Aristotle, 2000, pp. 1157a1, 1157a31–32; compare 2013, pp. 1236a16–21) or, even more radically, just "by accident" (Aristotle, 2000, p. 1156a16–17).[3] He even explicitly indicates that his tripartite classification of friendship is meant to be a concession to the common use of friendship (*philia*) in natural language (Aristotle, 2000, pp. 1157a25–31), although it is clear that his own understanding of the matter does not fully coincide with that use. On the other hand, Aristotle repeatedly aligns with the pre-philosophical use of the noun in common language throughout his argument, and deficient kinds of friendship are often called "friendship" all the same. Particularly instructive in this respect is his suggestion that lesser kinds of friendship are friendship "by resemblance." That is to say, they can be regarded to be friendship insofar as they come to instantiate, to a greater or lesser degree, certain attributes that are characteristic of virtuous friendship. As a case in point, it is *because* advantage and pleasure are also essential to virtuous friendship—virtue is both pleasant and advantageous—that relationships based on the mutually recognized reciprocation of such items can be called philia at all (Aristotle, 2000, pp. 1156b33–1157a3, 1158b5–8).

Fortunately, in spite of such exegetical difficulties, every party to the debate proceeds on the assumption that [T2] is true—and so will I. Because I am also prepared to concede both [T1] and [T3], at least for the sake of argument, all that remains for me to discuss

is [T4]. As noted in in section II, this thesis is accepted by all these scholars as a faithful construal of Aristotle's ideas. The main evidence for [T4] supplied by Fröding and Peterson (2011a) is a passage of the *Nicomachean Ethics* where, upon further reflection, Aristotle (2000) is arguing for exactly the opposite view that is attributed to him by them:

> The friendship of man and woman also seems natural. For human beings naturally tend to form couples more than to form cities, in as much as the household is antecedent to the city, and more necessary, and reproduction is more widely shared with animals. With other animals, the community extends only to this point, but human beings live together not only for reproductive purposes but also to supply what they need for life. For from the start their characteristic activities are divided, those of the man being different from those of the woman. They supply one another's needs, therefore, by putting their own talents into the common pool. (pp. 1162a16-a24)

On account of this passage, they conclude that "the main point of the argument appears to be that friendship among animals is impossible because animals merely meet up to reproduce but do not live together for "the various purposes of life." Humans, on the other hand, do indeed "live together" for "the various purposes of life" (Fröding & Peterson, 2011a, pp. 62–63). This is *not* what the text states, however. It states, instead, that the sort of friendship that arises between man and woman is grounded on some basic biological mechanisms that are also widely spread in the animal kingdom, mechanisms that are not regulated by their capacities qua *rational* animals but rather qua *animals*. Read carefully: "The friendship of man and woman also seems natural. *For* human beings naturally tend to form couples more than to form cities *in as much as* . . . reproduction is more widely shared with animals" (emphasis added). As can be gathered, the point of these lines is not that animals are incapable of being friends, but only that they, unlike human beings, cannot create households as a result of the kind of friendship (philia) that is required for reproduction. When man and woman come together, they are giving expression to the same kind of "natural" association that brings together male and female in other species for the sake of reproduction, and this bond is itself a form of philia according to Aristotle. Although that bond may certainly evolve into more complex forms of friendship in humans—where virtue, pleasure, or some advantage can be reciprocated (Aristotle, 2000, pp. 1162a24–27)—this is not required for this kind of "natural" friendship to emerge. In human beings, friendships based on the reciprocation of any of these items involves rational choice (Aristotle, 2000, p. 1157b29–30), but the "natural" friendship that arises between male and female does not (reading Aristotle, 2000, pp. 1162a16–24, with 1998, pp. 1252a26–31).

This is certainly consistent with Aristotle's overall stance on the matter. The thought that nonhuman animals are capable of friendship is fairly recurrent in Aristotle's philosophy. Throughout his ethical and biological writings, Aristotle is very clear, indeed emphatic, that animals are capable of friendship. For example, at the very beginning of *Nicomachean Ethics* VIII, where the official discussion of friendship is first introduced in the work, we are immediately told that friendship "occurs not only among human beings, but among birds and most animals" (Aristotle, 2000, pp. 1155a18–19). The same idea

reappears in several other passages of his ethical and biological writings (Aristotle, 1991, p. 612a20–23 with 2013, pp. 1236b5–10, 1942, pp. 753a9–17, with 1991, pp. 588b24–589a2, etc.).

Truth be told, in many of these passages Aristotle does not seem to be dealing with the kind of friendship that concerns Fröding and Peterson (2011a), Rowlands (2011), and Causey (2019). In many of them, philia is couched in terms of some sort of adaptive and widespread biological mechanism whereby species can survive and not in terms of a psychological trait of character, or relationship, present in some animals but not others—one remarkable exception is a passage from the *History of Animals* where Aristotle (1965) illustrates his doctrine of natural character by referring to the friendly natural character of dogs (pp. 488b20–24).[4] Most of these passages, that is, contain references to what has come to be known as "natural friendship" in Aristotle scholarship, this being the sort of natural and spontaneous bond that animals develop in mating and breeding contexts (see Aristotle, 1942, pp. 753a9–17, with 1991, pp. 588b24–589a2), and which therefore underlies family ties in humans. It is thus commonly accepted that Aristotle's treatment of natural friendship is orthogonal to his tripartite classification of friendship in his ethics (Annas, 1993, p. 255; Cooper, 1977, p. 620; Kahn, 1981, p. 22; Konstan, 1997, pp. 68–69). This of course makes Fröding and Peterson's reference to the passage of the *Nicomachean Ethics* (Aristotle, 2000, pp. 1162a17–23) all the more surprising, but it is precisely on these grounds that the passage also poses a serious challenge for anyone, myself included, who wishes to refute [T4]: While that passage does show that animals are capable of friendship (contrary to Fröding and Peterson's reading), the kind of friendship that is ascribed to them here is irrelevant for the main issue at stake. For one thing, it is friendship among members of the same species, indeed kinship relationships. For another, "natural" friendship cannot be subsumed into any of the three categories of friendship relevant for the debate.

Should we declare the case closed? I do not think so. Because these passages deal with a completely different notion of philia in animals, none of this can be interpreted as either supporting or rejecting [T4]. Consequently, further considerations are needed in order to settle the issue. One such consideration can be found in a key passage of the *Eudemian Ethics* where Aristotle (2013) observes that animals, including human beings, can become friends *and* that they can do so on the basis of mutual advantage. The text reads thus:

> This kind of friendship [i.e., virtuous friendship] is found only among human beings (for they alone are aware of rational choice), but the other kinds are also found among wild animals; and usefulness is even apparent to some small degree between tame animals and humans and between tame animals and each other, as Herodotus says that the plover is useful to the crocodile. (Aristotle, 2013, pp. 1236b5–9; Inwood and Woolf's translation with minor modifications)

This passage not only states that animals are capable of friendship, it argues, moreover, that they are capable of interspecies friendship, including friendship between nonhuman animals and human beings. I take this passage to offer compelling, indeed conclusive, evidence against the traditional suggestion that Aristotle does not allow for the possibil-

ity of friendship between human beings and nonhuman animals. Further yet, although Aristotle illustrates the general point by alluding to friendships of mutual advantage, the passage leaves no doubt that nonhuman animals can also build friendships based on pleasure, as the plural makes abundantly clear: "But the *other kinds* [i.e., those kinds that are not virtuous friendship] are also found among wild animals" (emphasis added).

IV

Let me conclude the present discussion with some final remarks on the connection between friendship and animal cognition. It goes without saying that Aristotle's theory of animal cognition is far too complex to be addressed properly within a few paragraphs (a good starting point is Sorabji, 1993). This means that I shall draw attention only to what is strictly necessary for the task at hand. To be more precise, central to the reading of Aristotle's theory of friendship that we find in Fröding and Peterson (2011a), and also Rowlands (2011), is the assumption that Aristotle advocates [T4] because of his belief that any kind of friendship presupposes certain cognitive capacities that animals are deprived of. If we take into account the passages just quoted in section III, we are thus left with two options, neither of which is compatible with the interpretation of Aristotle vindicated by these scholars. Since Aristotle explicitly admits that lesser forms of friendship, including those that arise from mutual advantage, can exist between human and nonhuman animals, either Aristotle must think that no such capacities are necessary for animal friendships or that at least some animals are also endowed with such capacities.

What was Aristotle's verdict? His allusion to the symbiotic relationship of crocodiles and plovers entails that he was committed to the second claim. This is confirmed by a passage of the *History of Animals*, where Aristotle (1991) adds valuable information about the peculiarity of their friendship:

> When crocodiles gape, the trochilos [i.e., the Egyptian plover] fly in and clean their teeth, and while they themselves are getting their food the crocodile perceives that he is being benefited and does not harm them, but when he wants them to go he moves his neck so as not to crush them in his teeth. (pp. 612a20–23)

Aristotle's description is brief but remarkable. The crocodile is credited not only with the capacity to perceive just one bird among many, but also with the awareness of being in presence of a benefactor—indeed a friend, if we are to read this text in conjunction with the passage from the *Eudemian Ethics* just quoted. Such an awareness,[5] moreover, modulates the crocodile's behavior accordingly, allowing the plover to feed and, in so doing, clean the crocodile's teeth. What's more, the description of the crocodile's cognitive state brings to the fore second orders' levels of intentionality: the immediate perception of a bird *and* the awareness that the bird in question is useful to him. The crocodile is even able to change the plover's behavior trough gestural communication: He shakes his neck in order to make the plover leave, thereby preventing the plover's imminent death when closing his mouth. It should come as no surprise, therefore, when we read a modern commentator noticing that in passages like these "Aristotle comes modestly close

to attributing animals a status of quasi-personhood by modem philosophical standards" (Coles, 1997, p. 295).[6]

It may be countered that the foregoing considerations are irrelevant for Fröding and Peterson's (2011a) interpretation of Aristotle. After all, when they ascribe to Aristotle the thought that animals simply lack the required cognitive capacities to establish friendships of mutual advantage, they have a very specific cognitive capacity in mind: communication (see section II above). For all that we know, maybe Aristotle is willing to concede that some animals exhibit higher-order levels of intentionality, but this is still consistent with his refusal to accept that they can communicate, which, on this reading, is essential for building friendships of mutual advantage according to Aristotle.

I shall not discuss whether the crocodile's shaking of its neck with the intention of making the plover fly off is an instance of communication or not—just for the record, I think it is. Instead, I would like to concentrate on the assertion that animals cannot communicate (in Aristotle's view). Once again, there is compelling textual evidence at our disposal to resist this interpretation. In what is perhaps the most famous passage of Aristotle's *Politics*, we learn that human beings are "more political" than other animals—which entails, it is worth noticing, that other animals are also political but to a lesser degree (compare Aristotle, 1965, pp. 487b33–488a10)—in virtue of the fact that only human beings possess *logos* (Aristotle, 1998, pp. 1253a7–18), usually translated in this context as "language" or "speech." Thanks to their capacity to communicate through logos, human beings are the only species who can express beliefs about what is just and unjust, beneficial and harmful (Aristotle, 1998, pp. 1253a15–18). This much is clear. But this is not to say, nor to entail, that nonhuman animals cannot communicate at all. In the same passage, Aristotle (1998) reminds us that other animals do not have speech but they do have (a) voice (*phônê*; p. 1253a10), which, unlike mere sounds, is a signifier (*sêmeion*) of the pleasure and pain that they feel. Consequently, from the fact that nonhuman animals cannot communicate through logos, it certainly does not follow that, in Aristotle's view, they cannot communicate (period). If so, what Fröding and Peterson (2011a) need to demonstrate is that communication through logos is necessary for any kind of friendship—at least for friendship of mutual advantage—to exist according to Aristotle. But this, of course, would be in direct contradiction with what Aristotle generally says about animal friendship throughout his works.

To sum up, we have strong reasons to oppose [T4] as a construal of Aristotle's account of friendship. Relatedly, there is no need to reinvent the wheel by turning to "recent" findings in cognitive ethology in order to show that friendships between human beings and nonhuman animals are indeed possible. Both the ethical framework and the empirical content that are required for substantiating this claim can already be found in Aristotle's ethics and biology. Which specific moral obligations toward animals can be extracted from Aristotle's account, I leave it open. But, whatever they are, the main question we need to ask ourselves, in Aristotle's own terms, is not whether we can be friends of mutual advantage with other animals but rather, since we can, what sort of conditions are

conducive to them and which are not. This is to ask, too, what sort of benefits we are entitled to demand from them and what kind of benefits they can expect from us.

Notes

1. Although the literature on the subject has increased dramatically in the last few decades (e.g., Belfiore, 2001; Cooper, 1977; Konstan, 1997; Nehamas, 2010; Pakaluk, 1999; Pangle, 2002; Price, 1989; Schoeman, 1985; Sherman, 1989; Sokolowski, 2001; Stern-Gillet, 1995), the question as to whether Aristotle allows for the possibility of friendship between nonhuman and human animals has never been properly addressed by any of these studies.

2. This last distinction is criticized by Causey (2019) on two grounds. First, Causey does not concede that humans and farmed animals can be friends to begin with given the exploitative nature of the relationship itself. If anything, the relationship between farmed animals and farmers is best understood along supposedly Aristotelian lines as a relationship between a human being and a "tool" (Causey, 2019, p. 2). Second, even if one were to grant, if only for the sake of argument, that such friendships are indeed possible, this would still not authorize the further conclusion that we have no moral obligations toward free-living animals. More generally, from the fact that A is my friend and B a stranger, it cannot be inferred that I have no moral obligations toward B. Causey's second objection may well rest on a misinterpretation of Fröding and Peterson's argument (2011a) who appear to be well-aware of this point (p. 67).

3. Passages like these invite us to reflect upon the logical framework that Aristotle employs to classify friendships into kinds (see, for example, the debate between Fortenbaugh, 1975, and Walker, 1979). Is "friendship," for example, a case of mere univocity or an instance of nonaccidental homonymy (e.g., Aristotle, 2013, pp. 1234b18–20, 1236a16–25)?

4. For Aristotle's theory of natural character, see Leunissen (2017).

5. "The crocodile *perceives* . . ." is here translating the Greek verb *aisthanomai*, which can mean "to perceive (with one's senses)" but also "to be aware of," "to realize" (this is indeed the meaning that it carries in the passage of *Eudemian Ethics* last quoted in section III where Aristotle, 1991, says that only human beings "are aware [*aisthanetai*] of rational choice," p. 1236b6).

6. Cole has in mind Frankfurt's (1971) famous account of personhood as involving higher orders' levels of intentionality.

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