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FEMINIST ANIMAL STUDIES

Theories, Practices, Politics

Edited by Erika Cudworth, Ruth E. McKie and Di Turgoose

ROUTLEDGE



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*Edited by Erika Cudworth, Ruth E. McKie and
Di Turgoose*

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WHAT ARE GOOD MULTISPECIES RELATIONS?

An analysis through the concept of caring relations

Maude Ouellette-Dubé

Introduction

The feminist care tradition claims that the right starting point for thinking about ethical relations with animals¹ are animal–human intersubjective relations (Adams and Gruen, 2014; Donovan and Adams, 1995, 1996, 2007; Gruen, 2015; Laugier, 2012). Humans are, for instance, affectively bonded to animals through compassion, which: ‘grows out of a relational self’ (Curtin, 2014, p.97). This relational view challenges the pessimist claim that humans cannot live ethically with other animals.² Rather, care theorists assume that animals and humans grow and develop through relations and interdependency. If we assume that some of these relations can be good, then the challenge is to know which ones are so, and how they can be promoted. We can formulate the problematic thus: what are good multispecies relations? Assuming that care theorists are right to emphasise the essentially relational character of animal–human interactions, then living ethically with animals and building a multispecies society asks to take relationality as a starting point. We do not have to argue that humans should care for animals, we rather need to stress that they should care better. This requires an understanding of the intersubjective nature of animal–human relations and an account of relations of good as well as bad care.

This chapter argues that good multispecies relations are relations of good care. Relations of good care are those within which an individual’s needs are recognised and met such that she can flourish. These relations are a starting point to think about common life in a multispecies society. Amongst such relations we find asymmetrical relations, work relations, and friendship. However, relations of utility are relations of bad care and are under no condition good multispecies relations. To defend these claims, I rely on the concept of *caring relations* and on the idea that

good care is sustained by *attitudes of care*. The view defended here assumes the intersubjective character of animal–human relations. This chapter provides a framework to situate complex multispecies relations and an analysis of their respective ethical character. Its aim is to strengthen arguments of feminist care theory and to gain a better understanding of actual practices of caring for animals.

To develop the argument, I will rely on examples discussed in contemporary research on equine³–human interactions and relations (Birke and Thompson, 2018; Bornemark et al., 2019; Coulter, 2016; De Giorgio and De Giorgio-Schooli, 2016). Horses and humans share a complex and intricate relational history. As Linda Birke and Kirrilly Thompson formulate it, they have been human ‘co-travellers’ for millennia (2018, p.18). Equines have played key roles in developing human civilisation (Thein, 2005), providing horsepower for agriculture and transport. Entanglements between horse and human lives are not only economic and utility based, but also emotional, symbolic, and spiritual. Horses uphold many different roles in human society (sometimes simultaneously) considered as workers, athletes, companions, family members, even healers. The increased attention to ethical questions between equines and humans is thus no coincidence. These relations lend themselves to the present ethical analysis, precisely because they underscore the multispecies interdependency central in care analysis.

The structure of the chapter runs as follows: in the ‘The feminist care tradition in animal ethics’ section, I present the main ideas of feminist care theory and introduce the notion of *caring relations*. We gather that care analysis involves first identifying caring relations and second scrutinising these relations for their ethical value. In the ‘Four kinds of animal–human caring relations’ section, relying on examples of horse–human relations, I present and analyse four kinds of animal–human caring relations: asymmetrical relations, relations of utility, work relations, and the possibility of friendship.

The feminist care tradition in animal ethics

The feminist ethics of care construes ethical questions around the notions of *relationships*, *responsibilities*, and *needs* (Garrau, 2014; Gilligan, 1982; Held, 2006; Molinier et al., 2009; Paperman and Laugier, 2005). It thus shapes ethical inquiry around questions such as ‘What are my responsibilities?’, ‘What does this particular person need?’, or ‘What does this relationship need to thrive?’. Care has thus ‘rejected abstract, rule-based principles in favour of situational, contextual ethics’ (Donovan and Adams, 2007, p.2). The concept of ‘care’ is normative, as it guides ethical action. It is also descriptive, as it is forged through the study of the experience of actors and workers of care (such as the daily activities of care needed to maintain the life and growth of a child⁴). A key assumption of this ethical tradition is a conception of ourselves as *inter-dependent* and, therefore, as *vulnerable* (Laugier, 2012). Relations of interdependence characterise all persons – and not only, for instance, children and elders – as needing care and being bound through those needs. Moral agents are portrayed within the ethics of care as ‘situated in a particular context and concerned

by the particular relations in which they [as subjects] are embedded' (Garrau, 2014, p.45).⁵ Caring activities fall outside the private and public life division of labour. They accommodate foundational activities that form a 'life-sustaining web' (Fischer and Tronto, 1990, p.40) to sustain personal, political, and social life.

Care first established itself with regards to questions specific to the ethical treatment of animals through a critique of rationalist assumptions common to utilitarian and rights theory (Donovan and Adams, 1996, 2007). A key problem care theorists identify is that a strictly rationalist framework – with its emphasis on reasoning, deliberation, and application of general principles – obscures the role of moral attitudes like attention, emotions, and empathy (Adams and Gruen, 2014; Gruen, 2015; Kheel, 2008). Attention, emotions, and empathy are key *attitudes of care* and mobilised within caring practices to ensure good care. These attitudes do not merely invite one to be emotionally bound to an individual other. Rather, the synchronicity of these attitudes – one is attentive, one takes another individual's perspective, one feels for that individual and the situation – equips a moral agent with an understanding of a particular situation that guides her actions. For instance, in the contemporary context of animal exploitation, taking the forms of mass slaughter, factory farms, laboratory research and so on, attention is to be given to 'the individual suffering of an animal', but also, and crucially, 'to the political and economic systems that are causing the suffering' (Donovan and Adams, 2007, p.3). Once proper attention is given, one can no longer shield oneself from the suffering endured by animals, thus taking their perspective and being guided by the compassion one feels for their plight.

Although care theory emphasises attention, empathy, sympathy' and compassion as key attitudes of care, many authors converge on the idea that attention plays an overarching epistemic role in navigating our ethical relationships (Garrau, 2014; Gruen, 2015, pp.35–37; Kheel, 2008). As Lori Gruen argues, we might consider all of empathy, sympathy' and compassion as forms of attention (2015, p.37). While compassion is an emotion whereby one suffers with another, while showing concern and desire to alleviate her plight (Snow, 1991; Ouellette-Dubé, 2019), Gruen (2015) reminds us that ethical relations range above and beyond suffering. Her notion of *entangled empathy* should capture the role of attention also within relations not involving suffering. Daily care activities need to be supported by an attentive attitude:

understood as a sensibility to the particularity of a situation. This attention includes a passive element and an active element: it supposes a capacity to let oneself be affected by what is happening and to recognize this affective implication within the relations in which one is embedded.

Garrau, 2014, p.50⁶

This attentive attitude, as Clarke writes, is an 'active receptivity' (2013, p.390). We should position ourselves in such a way that ethically important information about the world reliably presents itself to us.

Besides uncovering unethical treatment, attitudes of care also promote practices through which the needs of an individual are recognised and met such that she can flourish. Care is thus a reflection on how to meet responsibilities and maintain relationships, guided through the study of daily acts of care. It is, as Sandra Laugier observes, ‘the exploration of practices and of the immanence of ordinary life’. (2008, p.89)⁷ The performance of those acts needs to be directed by ‘the capacity to grasp the sense of the action and of the situation, the perception of what is important’ (2008, p.89). The capacity to grasp what is important is, once again, a way of paying attention to others in their particularity that stems from the concern for this particular other and for preserving this relationship (Garrau, 2014; Laugier, 2008; Nurock, 2010; Paperman and Laugier, 2005; Tronto, 1993). Therefore, it is not only the acts and practices of care that are ethically relevant, but that those be guided by attitudes of care.

Two things are noteworthy for the present analysis. One is that an ethical analysis of animal–human interactions through the lens of care sets up *relationality*, resulting from interdependence and mutual entanglements, as the right starting point for ethical reflection (Cudworth, 2011; Gruen, 2015; Haraway, 2008). Care analysis, that is, urges us to recognise the fundamentally relational nature of our interactions with animals and uphold ethical standards that can nourish these relations. Second, the recognition of relationality alone is insufficient. As the examples in the ‘Four kinds of animal–human caring relations’ section will illustrate, one can be responsible for another being’s needs, even with full intention to meet those needs, while nevertheless failing. As Marti Kheel (2008) rightly argues, relations of care can be abusive. As she stresses: ‘what is needed is not care as universal norm, but *appropriate* care’ (2008, p.224). Hence, care analysis has strongly emphasised relationality in building an ethical life with animals and provides a framework to recognise our responsibility within these relations. It explicated the benefits of recognising this relationality but has yet to provide a compelling framework within which to recognise when animal–human relations are abusive, damaging, exploitative, and oppressive. The present discussion should contribute to filling this gap.

Caring relations

Virginia Held’s (2006) notion of *caring relations* can help delineate the space of ethical analyses of animal–human relations. One is in a caring relation when one is *responsible for* or *takes responsibility* for a particular other. How these responsibilities arise depends on the nature of the relation. A parent, for instance, is *de facto* responsible for her child, a person who adopts a companion animal *takes on* responsibility for her, a person who purchases animals to use their bodies for profit *eo ipso* takes responsibility for these animals. One might object that responsibilities do not necessarily arise from such relations. Children or companion animals are, after all, sometimes abandoned or surrendered for adoption. These practices, however, do not disprove the point, but show how one can fail to meet responsibilities (abandonment) or how they can be passed on (adoption).

Ethical analysis through caring relations shifts ethical success from an *individual-centred* to a *relation-centred* focus. For, although activities of care generally take place between two individuals (e.g. activities of care for one's child, an elderly parent, a medical patient, or a companion animal), focus on caring relations emphasises that both individuals maintain this relation. In a parent–child relation, emphasis is generally put on care provided by the parent. This individual-centred focus, however, risks effacing the needs of the care-giver (the parent) and risks legitimising an ethics of self-sacrifice, an objection often raised towards care.⁸ To thrive caring relations suppose attitudes and practices that ensure that the needs of both individuals forming the relation are recognised and met. Importantly, then, a caring relation can be damaged by both individuals forming the relation. This does not minimise the fact that significant power asymmetries often shape these relations (as discussed in the 'Asymmetrical relations' section).

Some might object that the notion of *needs* is too poor semantically to be a useful ethical concept. Doesn't a person raising chickens for their flesh recognise and meet each individual chicken's needs, in as much as each has water, food, space to move around, and social interactions? This is not the case because recognition of needs implies the good of the individual which is not reducible to the physiological needs that support physical growth. Rather, needs are what is necessary for a being to *flourish*. As Martha Nussbaum (2006, 2011) argues, one flourishes when one develops one's cognitive, social, and affective potential. A particular animal flourishes, according to Nussbaum's capabilities account, if she has physical integrity and the possibility of having goals, building relations, exercising imagination, playing and freely experiencing emotions. The responsibility of the care-taker is to provide support for the animals' flourishing, which excludes, in most circumstances, raising them and killing them for their flesh.

Good care is provided when individuals in a caring relation can flourish, conversely bad care hinders flourishing. As Held (2006, p.92) stresses, the 'relationship is not reducible to the individual projects of its members'. The caring person does not tend to the other's needs to fulfil a personal project. Good care is not an achievement, but an activity one engages in within the caring relation. This activity is guided by caring attitudes with the aim that those forming the relation flourish and that an individual's needs are recognised and met. Conversely, flourishing is hindered by attitudes like arrogance, ignorance, or negligence that prevent needs from being recognised or met.

There is a difference between acknowledging caring relations and establishing whether these relations provide good or bad care. Caring relations presuppose structures of responsibility and forms moral agency where good care can arise, but are not *de facto* good. As Held argues: 'The various aspects and expressions of care and caring relations need to be subjected to moral scrutiny and evaluated, not just observed and described' (2006 p.11). In the next section, I outline four kinds of caring relations between horses and humans and discuss conditions under which these relations provide good care and those under which flourishing is hindered.

Four kinds of animal–human caring relations

I propose that four kinds of animal–human relations can be identified within recent research on equine–human interactions and relations (Birke and Thompson, 2018; Bornemark et al., 2019; Coulter, 2016): *asymmetrical relations*, *relations of utility*, *work relations*, and *friendship*. Contemporary research supports the idea that these relations emerge through lived ordinary equine practices. They are descriptive categories which I will probe for their ethical substance. I assume that these four kinds of relations are caring relations, that is, within which one is *responsible for* or *takes responsibility for* a particular other. There is a tension, tangible within equine practices, between the way humans responsible for animals see themselves in their roles, and the way the flourishing of animals is actually supported. Although humans rightly endorse responsibilities for animals, they often nevertheless fail to provide good care. The question is, which of these caring relations provide care that promotes flourishing?

Asymmetrical relations

Asymmetrical relations are those within which there is asymmetry of *power* and seem particularly problematic in relations between animals and humans. Many are critical of the asymmetrical relation between humans and horses because of the use of power by humans *over* horses (Hansen, 2016; Hurst, 2015): humans have power over horses' bodies, livelihood, exercise possibilities, feed, where they live and with whom. The use of power is criticised when it is used to discipline the horse's body in view of elite sport achievements that are the rider's (and trainer's) goal, having little to do with the horse's own good (Hansen, 2016; Patton, 2019). Yet seeing as asymmetrical relations are often justified between humans, the question remains whether, and in which circumstances, they are justified between equines and humans. As bell hooks (1984) argues, power does not have to be equated with dominance and control. Similarly, Paul Patton considers that power can take both oppressive and/or hospitable forms when exercised within the lives of equine fellows. As we saw in the 'The feminist care tradition in animal ethics' section, relations of good care are those within which attitudes of care are exercised such that they promote the flourishing of those in the relation. Asymmetrical relations cannot be relations of good care if power is exercised to reinforce oppression, for example, forcing horses into obedience. Rather, the exercise of power should be 'creative and life-affirming' (hooks, 1984, p.84), thus *for horses* – lending itself to their needs, as opposed to 'power exercised over horses solely in the service of human needs and interests' (Patton, 2019, p.95).

One could thus justifiably exercise power to promote the flourishing of individual horses. A care-taker could provide good care as long as the exercise of power is guided by caring attitudes. Kirrilly Thompson, for instance, recounts a turning point in her relation with her mare Lavazza. Thompson was so engrossed in life commitments and horseshow commitments that she found herself, one day, struck

by the fact that ‘she had lost touch with her innate desire to connect with her horse’ (Birke and Thompson, 2018, p.2). After this, Thompson made a conscious effort to greet Lavazza eye-to-eye, to ask how she was doing, and to leave room for a response. Meeting Lavazza on her own terms, not merely riding with one’s own goals in focus, and paying attention to the equine are the first steps towards good asymmetrical relations.

Daily care provided with proper attention enables flourishing. Horses are complex and intricate, with rich and complex emotional and social lives which humans have long been at pains to understand (Kiley-Worthington, 2005; Wendt, 2010). As such, supporting a life for horses that is creative and life-affirming would include physical needs as well as their cognitive, affective, and social development and well-being (De Giorgio and De Giorgio-Schoorl, 2016). Although good caring practices can involve misunderstandings and shortcomings, caring attitudes maintain the care-taker epistemically engaged in a way such that power cannot be exercised over the horse merely to obtain services from her. The lives of stalled riding horses in equestrian centres are usually isolated and dull. Although horses are provided with food, water, physical security, and exercise, these conditions would not suffice because the caring activities are directed by economic and material considerations. Asymmetrical relations of good care would thus drastically differ from those within which equines are only provided for their physical health and must otherwise answer human demands. Thus, daily care, such as feeding, grooming, and exercising, although they presuppose entrenched asymmetries, could provide for good *or* bad care depending on whether they are carried out with or without caring attitudes.

The perspective of horsepersons creates an additional difficulty in unearthing unethical practices involving power. For instance, although power is generally used within riding to discipline horse’s bodies and minds for the use of human sport, education, and recreation, riders believe they are treating horses well. This is striking, for instance, in the research done by Mari Zetterqvist Blokhuis and Petra Andersson (2019) with high-level dressage riders.⁹ Their research shows that riders commonly construe their horses as *objects* that should obey orders, and as *subjects* that are being trained (and must obey orders) for their own development. There is thus a double-tension: that horses are being trained as objects, and even if the horse is recognised as a subject with her own good, that training methods are oppressive. As Patton (2019) notes, although it is warranted to provide horses with a basic education and life-long possibilities to play and exercise, traditional training methods are not life-affirming and do not provide horses with creative educational opportunities. This suggests that equine practices involve ubiquitous training habits that support asymmetrical relations of bad care. Even if the good of the horse is sought, traditional training methods thus have to come under scrutiny. Again, the difficulty is that oppressive training methods are not maintained by malevolence, but are supported by invisible ideologies valuing bodily discipline and obedience (Wendt, 2010). Dismantling these norms will come as alternative methods of education and life with horses are sought (see Birke and Thompson, 2018).

Relations of utility

The four relations discussed here are not mutually exclusive and can overlap, as asymmetrical relations and relations of utility do. As we saw above, criticism of asymmetrical relations focuses on power used to instrumentalise horses. As such, the tension noted between human responsibility for an equine and failure to provide good care comes to light at the intersection of asymmetrical relations and relations of utility: it is because power is used to instrumentalise horses that these relations provide bad care. What is the ethical problem with instrumentalisation?

From a care perspective, reducing a being to her usefulness is a problem because it conditions care. Flourishing is not understood in relation to who the horse is, but in relation to a purpose assigned by humans: care is conditional on the fact that a horse can fulfil her purpose as *dressage* horse, *race* horse, *carriage* horse, and so on. Within relations of utility, the care-taker construes needs in relation to this purpose (dressage, racing, pulling carriages). However, one flourishes in accordance to one's function proper (one's *telos*), and not in accordance with some accidental function, like racing. The caring person should thus ask what this horse needs to flourish as the distinct individual that she is, and not what she needs to improve racing performance.

A further problem with relations of utility is that horses are exchangeable: a thoroughbred race horse, for instance, is a means to an end and will be sold and replaced as soon as she no longer performs; that is, when she outstrips her earning potential. The problem is that relations of utility *are* caring relations in as much as one is *responsible* for the other, but they provide bad care because, in reducing the relation to external goals (economic, sport performance) one no longer engages in proper activities of care. As we can recall from the 'The feminist care tradition in animal ethics' section, establishing caring relations is only the first step is assessing ethical relations, the relation also must be ethically scrutinised. It is because of this complex analysis that care theory proves efficient to uncover ethical tensions at the heart of actual practices. And ethical tensions need to be unearthed. For instance, as Iris Bergmann notes, the thoroughbred industry, to counter-act increased criticism by the public and animal protection organisations who denounce ill-treatment of horses in horse-racing, claims "'The well-being and protection of the horse" is to be "an overarching philosophy" [of thoroughbred industry]' (2019, p.121). The industry emphasises their 'love for the thoroughbred' (p.120) and that competing horses are athletes who should be cared for from the beginning of their career and throughout their retirement. In the face of such claims, care analysis uncovers the fact that although they are given human 'care' (fed, groomed, cleaned, trained, given medical assistance) (see also Bergmann, 2020), the thoroughbred horses are not cared for in and of themselves. To put it bluntly, they claim their 'love for the thoroughbred' and care analysis asks: do you love them well? Hence, a race horse cared for only in as much as she races well and sold once she is outperformed does not – cannot – receive good care.

The analysis would be similar, for instance, for riding ponies, sold once the child outgrows her, both because her needs would be construed in terms of the purpose of riding and because she is made exchangeable. Moreover, within relations of utility, given that the horse is construed partly or entirely as an object, treatment will often cascade into dynamics of abuse, domination, or negligence because one is forcing the ‘object’ to fit its purpose.

Work relations

It is a common assumption that horses are *workers*. Human descriptions of their time spent with horses also generally involve work language: doing ‘ground work’, doing ‘workout’. Some horses are explicitly attributed jobs, such as ‘cowhorses’ (Petitt, 2019). If anything, horses are subjects that experience work and can engage in cooperative productive activity. Work, however, is controversial. Many horses are workers within relations of utility such as those in equestrian centres, used for humans to learn to ride. Generally, according to the framework defended here, relations within which humans use animal bodies to produce marketable goods and those that commodify animals as means of production are relations of utility.

The relations of work I bring into focus here are rather those that gained recent interest in contemporary animal ethics and warrant the question whether animals should be considered workers legally, with labour rights: ‘There may be certain activities that animals enjoy doing, whose social, legal, and political recognition as “work” could have transformative effects’ (Blattner et al., 2020a, p.4). Blattner et al. argue for models where animals perform labour that is good for them, while providing a critical analysis of the idea of animals as workers. Kendra Coulter (2016, 2020) coined the expression ‘humane job’ to refer to labour that is intrinsically good for animals (2020, p.35). Within humane jobs, Coulter argues, animals ‘should be entitled to retirement, dignity, and a great deal of autonomy’ (2020, p.35). This avenue is promising given that animals would be recognised for what they perform and considered as deserving to benefit from this labour. Although many theorists frame animals as workers in a positive light, caution is called for. As Donaldson and Kymlicka (2020) note, it would be ill-advised to incorporate animals as workers in a society where work is heavily normalised and moralised: making of paid employment the norm for social recognition and status.

I would stress two points here. First, is that even within a multispecies society where animals are recognised as workers with rights, these relations should be supported by attitudes of care: being attentive to the worker, asking what are her needs, ensuring that she has proper conditions. Work supervised by those attitudes would promote a horse’s flourishing and could otherwise become abusive, exploitative, or alienating, thus providing bad care. False assumptions often support forced work (even if not physically abusive) where horses are ridden irrespective of their preferences. It is problematic, as Coulter (2019) notes, to assume that horses are having leisure time when cooperating with humans. In general, providing ethical

work lives for horses demands that they be recognised as individuals with needs whose flourishing outweighs focus on productivity.

Second, caring relations presuppose underrecognised forms of work that are not production oriented and generally unpaid: emotional work, intellectual work. Recognising these forms of work is promising as they reflect the kind of post-work society advocated for by Donalson and Kymlicka (2020). Animals might be primarily valued for their support role in maintaining interpersonal relations and in thriving more generally. Horses perform communication and emotional labour in their lives with humans. Importantly, recognising these forms of labour as constituting relations of work would have the benefit of not underestimating the kind of effort it represents for horses to share and build a common life with humans. This non-productive form of labour has been especially studied within the field of Equine Assisted Therapy which could have, according to Lerner and Silfverberg (2019), potential to support flourishing. Good care work relations thus demand reconfiguring our understanding of animals as workers, at least to include non-productive forms of labour. Horses are workers when they provide emotional support and when they work to understand humans. Thus, the general idea of work relations is not that horses work for humans, but that humans support them in developing work lives within which they find meaning in cooperation and where labour is good for them.

Friendship

The question of friendship with horses has grown in importance in equine cultures. Several horse magazines now actively discuss the question. For instance, the German magazine *Cavallo* (motto ‘Because we love horses’) targets this particular relation. Alternative methods of training, like those of natural horsemanship, that seek to promote respect towards horses, although they are object of criticism, also reflect this turn (Birke and Thompson, 2018; Patton, 2019). This being said, I contend that friendship is the kind of relation that is most *misattributed* within horse–human relations. Humans pay, for instance, for weekly riding lessons in equestrian centres, where they are ‘handed down’ a horse to ride and, on the grounds of their feelings for the horse, will say they are friends. We need to understand the ethical weight of these misattributions, to understand why they arise and when attributions of friendship are correct.

Friendship is related to the idea of building a relation of trust with horses, as opposed to relations often based on dominance, which have typically prevailed in horse training history (Wendt, 2010). In the face of human effort to recover such relations, we need to understand under which conditions humans can be friends with horses. Can one really be friends, for instance, with a horse who is expected to race well to earn money? Can one develop something worth calling friendship, as many often assume they have, when the primary relation is one of utility?

To shed light on the idea of friendship with horses and on the reasons behind common misattributions of this kind of relation, I rely on an Aristotelean analyses of

friendship.¹⁰ Aristotle distinguishes between friendship based on utility, on pleasure and *philia* – friendship based on true love.¹¹ The first two forms of friendship are common, but of lesser ethical worth because friends for utility or pleasure love each other only insofar as they gain some good for themselves in the relationship, and friendship is likely to dissolve as soon as the other no longer fulfils their purpose. In the example of the weekly rider, any friendship attributed is one of pleasure or utility. The rider enters this relation because she desires to learn to ride – her affiliation with the horse is conditional on her fulfilling this project. Although friendship based on utility is not true friendship, Aristotle argues that ‘mutual loving’ (NE 1155b27–29) can arise within these relations. This affection bonds individuals, but it is motivated by a goal outside the relation: that one can learn to ride, and for the horse the expectation of reward (like food). Friendship based on utility or pleasure are particular forms of relation of utility that one can misidentify as true friendship given the forms of superficial affection that can arise within them.

Philia, true friendship, is not possible if we have our own agenda because it is based on love for the other herself – love based on who she is without qualification or condition. One wishes good to the other for her own sake. *Philia* involves a form of love that needs time to grow and thrives on mutual trust. We can suppose that this form of friendship is supported by attitudes of care, thus involving attention to the other and her needs, empathy for her and emotions such as compassion, concern, kindness, sympathy. *Philia* paradigmatically provides good care. This characterisation would also suit forms of asymmetrical relations within which power is exercised to support the other’s flourishing. There are similarities between these relations; the difference lies, however, in Aristotle’s claim that true friendship is *reciprocal*.

Reciprocity in good wishes, love, time dedicated, and trust is key to this form of alliance. It implies that both individuals are actively promoting the other’s good and thus seem to entail symmetry of power within the relation. At this point, one might wonder whether *philia* is not too demanding a possibility between animals and humans. Given current legal and social structures, the kind of egalitarian relation that *philia* entails seems impossible. This should however not discourage the effort to build conditions under which it can arise and is no hindrance to our wishing that it does.

Although our political context might not allow the proper reciprocity to take place at large, we might find successful instances of *philia* between animals and humans. To illustrate this, I first discuss what I take to be animal–human *philia* between wombat and human and discuss a possible equine–human example. Australian philosopher Val Plumwood and Birubi, a wombat, shared their lives for over 12 years. Retelling their story, Plumwood unmistakably describes a relation where each other’s presence is sought, each individual is loved for who they are and both contribute to the other’s good. Crucially, she acknowledges that Birubi was free to reciprocate the relation: ‘His ability to control the access between his world and mine enabled him to be active in choosing and structuring the balance between us, to enter my world while still fully retaining his wombatness’ (Plumwood, 2012, p.49).

I maintain some scepticism that *philia* arises between horses and humans, mostly because I believe that what we take to be friendship would be better qualified as good asymmetrical relations or relations of utility in which affection develops. In other words, the relations we see as friendship, even if they have worth, do not meet all the conditions of *philia*. This being said, the story of Ren Hurst (2015) seems to provide an example of equine–human *philia*. Her story begins where that of many horsepeople does – riding lessons as a child, proficient equestrian sports competing – but evolves into something that could be an example of unconditioned love between horses and humans. Hurst shares her life with 13 horses she describes as being ‘healed’ (2015, p.165). She also describes another ongoing healing process, the healing of her beliefs that horses have to be ridden, controlled, and shepherded by humans. The horse Shai played a central role in teaching her new ways of being with horses in which she dropped her expectations and eventually started spending time with, and cared for, the horse herd as an aim in itself. This new life includes ‘consciously being present to them’ (2015, p.164), which she cultivates through dedicated daily sessions with the herd. This, she writes: ‘has also made me very aware of others’ needs even if they lack the ability to communicate those needs effectively’ (2015, p.164). Hurst’s life with horses is radically different from what she had experienced in equine cultures: a new paradigm she advocates for in the very act of living it.

Given the stories of Birubi and Plumwood and Shai and Hurst, there might be conditions under which true friendship can arise between animals and humans. It might be possible to shed expectations and imagine novel ways of sharing and shaping space, time, and affection with no other project than that of being together.

Conclusion

The goal of this chapter was to consider different kinds of animal–human relations through care analysis. I identified four kinds of caring relations – relations within which one is responsible for or takes responsibility for another – asymmetrical relations, relations of utility, work relations, and relations of friendship. I relied on examples of horse–human relations for the analysis. I argued that given the right use of power, asymmetrical relations can be relations of good care. I argued that relations of utility, because they position the individual as an exchangeable means, with a purpose to be fulfilled outside herself, provide bad care. As we saw with cases of friendship for utility, mutual affections can nevertheless arise. This suggests that some relations of utility are not necessarily experienced as oppressive by individual subjects, but are nevertheless structurally oppressive. I argued that work relations, especially relations of co-working or non–production-oriented labour, can provide conditions of good care. True friendship or *philia* is supported by attitudes of care and is ethical but also the most demanding of the four relations discussed and demands we considerably rethink the structures of our lives – individually and politically – with animals.

This framework is only a sketch and faces a number of limitations. The four relations discussed most likely do not exhaust all relevant kinds of animal–human relations, and it would be interesting to question whether the framework I outlined could extend to other kinds of relations such as collaboration.¹² Yet, this framework nevertheless provides tools to identify particular relations that emerge from our practices with animals, to appreciate their ethical character and to make us aware of tensions in those practices. Ultimately, this framework underscores how care ethics informs a critical perspective to build better lives with animals.

Notes

- 1 It must be acknowledged that humans are animals, despite the oft drawn distinction between human and nonhuman animals. To simplify the text however, I use ‘animal’ to refer to nonhuman animals and ‘human’ to refer to human animals.
- 2 Amongst those who defend the abolition of animal exploitation, ‘abolitionists’, some argue for the pessimist claim that abolition ‘requires severing relationships with animals’ (Blattner et al., 2020a, p.3).
- 3 Equines or Equidae (*equus*) are a broad family of animals including horses (*equus ferus caballus*) and also zebras, donkeys, and onagers (Thein, 2005). To simplify, I use ‘equine’ and ‘horses’ interchangeably in this text.
- 4 As Molinier et al. (2009) emphasise, the care work involved in raising a child should not be attributed only to the daily work of the parent, but to the whole of the community involved in raising the child.
- 5 My translation from French.
- 6 My translation from French.
- 7 My translation from French.
- 8 The first formulations of care ethics (Gilligan, 1982) were criticised for defending an ethics of self-effacement. To address this, Fabienne Brugère (2011, pp.20–26) explains that one does not ‘lose oneself’ within caring practices, but includes oneself (and one’s needs) within the contextualised process of ethical decision making.
- 9 Sport dressage is an Olympic discipline with a long history. It seeks to train a number of precise movements. As Blokhuis and Andersson (2019) discuss, this ‘sport’ has been ethically criticised.
- 10 An Aristotelean framework provides a working notion of friendship that is more demanding than those found in the relevant literature. Blattner et al. (2020b), for instance, rely on common intuition to discuss friendship between species in a sanctuary (pp.11–12). Birke and Thompson (2018) briefly consider the question of friendship with horses (pp.57–58) but raise concerns that support my cautious scepticism.
- 11 Books VIII and IX of Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* are devoted to this topic. All references are to the Terence Irwin (1999) translation.
- 12 I thank Friederike Zenker for this point.

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