Abstract

In this paper I will identify an argument for the conclusion that all human moral agents have stronger reasons to promote the interests of other human beings than they do to promote the interests of nonhuman animals, and I will explain why I think this argument is unsound. The argument employs an empirical claim, that all human beings are more closely *genealogically* related to all other humans than they are to any nonhuman animal, and a moral claim, that one's *genealogical relationship* to an individual is a morally relevant consideration. The moral claim is supported by a comparison between genealogically related individuals and a family.

Keyword: speciesism, partiality, genealogical relationships, marginal cases, animal ethics, contrast cases

Genealogical Relationships Do Not Support Indirect Speciesism[1]

The argument that I will consider in this paper begins with the very plausible claim that family members have stronger moral reasons regarding each other—e.g., reasons to promote each other's interests, reasons not to harm each other—than do individuals who are not family members. Part of the explanation of these stronger reasons, according to the argument I will consider, is the fact that family members are, typically, closely connected to each other *genealogically*: That is, one family member is the child of another, two family members have a parent in common, etc. Suppose that genealogical relationships *do* ground moral reasons, as claimed by this partial explanation of family members' stronger reasons. In that case, there is a well-supported evolutionary claim—that all living human beings have a more recent ancestor in common with all other living human beings than with any living nonhuman animal (hereafter simply "animals") (Velasco, 2009, p. 483)—that is relevant to the ethics of how human beings treat animals: There is at least one kind of moral reason—i.e., a moral reason grounded in *genealogical relationships*—that all human moral agents have regarding *other humans*, and that they have, if at all, in an attenuated form regarding *animals*. The existence of such asymmetrical reasons could be used to justify the view that it is permissible for human moral agents to harm animals in ways that it would be impermissible to harm other. This justification of differential treatment—i.e., asymmetrical reasons grounded in genealogical relationships—deserves careful consideration because, unlike many of the prominent justifications of differential treatment of humans and animals, this justification avoids a powerful objection: the so-called "problem of marginal cases." My goal in this paper is to lay out in its most defensible form an argument for the following claim—that, in virtue of genealogical relationships, human moral agents have stronger reasons regarding other humans than they do regarding animals—and to explain why I

[1] Robert Streiffer made many very helpful comments on this paper.

think this argument should be rejected.

Section 1: Genealogical Relatedness

My brother and I have a common ancestor who is separated from each of us by one generation. My cousin and I have a common ancestor who is separated from each of us by two generations. I'll use the term "genealogical relatedness" to refer to this kind of connection by ancestry and descent. Now I'll define three terms that will be useful for discussing genealogical relatedness.

The *genealogical distance* between two individuals is the number of generations separating them via their most recent common ancestor (MRCA).[2] A and B are *more closely related genealogically* than are C and D if and only if the genealogical distance separating A and B is less than the genealogical distance separating C and D.[3] My brother and I are more closely related genealogically than my cousin and I because the shortest route from my brother to me moves through only two generations (via one of our parents), while the shortest route from my cousin to me moves through four generations (via one of our grandparents). It will also be useful to talk about how closely A and B are related genealogically, without comparing them to C and D. For this I'll use the term "degree of genealogical relatedness"; my cousin and I have a certain degree of genealogical relatedness; my brother and I have a different, higher degree of genealogical relatedness. (The degree of genealogical relatedness between two individuals is inversely related to the genealogical distance between them).

Section 2: Genealogical Relatedness and Shared Species Membership

[2] The term "most recent common ancestor" should not be taken to imply uniqueness. For example, my brother and I have two MRCAs, our two parents.
[3] This definition allows that some of these individuals—say A and C—might be identical.

GENEALOGICAL RELATIONSHIPS DO NOT SUPPORT INDIRECT SPECIESISM

At first glance, it may seem that the view I described in the introduction—that human moral agents have stronger reasons, grounded in genealogical relatedness, regarding other humans than regarding animals—is indistinguishable from the view that *shared species membership* grounds asymmetrical reasons. In this section I'll explain why, in fact, there is a clear conceptual difference.

The two kinds of theories at issue are (1) theories that treat *genealogical relatedness* as a morally relevant feature, and (2) theories that treat *shared species membership* as a morally relevant feature.[4] A theory of the first kind tells us that, if you are *genealogically related to an individual,* that fact grounds a moral reason for you regarding that individual (for example, a moral reason for you to promote that individual's interests). Call this kind of theory a "genealogically focused theory".[5] A theory of the second kind tells us that if you are *a member of an individual's species*, that fact grounds a moral reason for you regarding that individual (for example, a moral reason to promote that individual's interests). Call this kind of theory a "species-focused theory." These theories have different implications about what moral reasons we have. I'll describe two ways of spelling out a genealogically focused theory and argue that each version has different implications than the most plausible way of spelling out a species-focused theory.[6]

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[4] When I say that a feature is "morally relevant," I mean "morally relevant *in its own right*." This contrasts with being morally relevant only because of a correlation or relationship with a different feature that is morally relevant in its own right.

[5] I'll use the expressions "a reason that exists in virtue of X" and "a reason grounded in X" (or "an X-grounded reason") synonymously.

[6] It's important to recognize that the theories I'm considering here (genealogically focused theories and species-focused theories), are theories about just one particular kind of moral reason; they are not theories about one's all-things-considered moral reasons. A species-focused theory is just a theory about those moral reasons that are grounded in *shared species membership* (if there are any). A genealogically focused theory is just a theory about moral reasons that are grounded in genealogical relationships (if there are any). Neither claims to be the final word on one's all-things-considered moral reasons.

(For the remainder of this section, I'll continue to use the example of a moral reason to promote an individual's interests: I'm bracketing the question of what exactly the content may be of reasons grounded by genealogical relatedness or shared species membership.[7] Also, I'll generally stop explicitly describing the reasons under discussion as *moral* reasons, even though those are the kinds of reasons I'm referring to.)

The most plausible version of a species-focused theory is one according to which moral agents have a reason to promote the interests of *all and only their conspecifics*, and all such reasons are of equal strength (moving forward I'll refer to this theory just as "*the* species-focused theory"). So, the species-focused theory implies that there's an equally strong reason for me to promote the interests of all and only other humans. Now I'll describe the first way of spelling out a genealogically focused theory.

Genealogical relatedness comes in degrees. Perhaps the strength of reasons *grounded* by genealogical relatedness (assuming there are such reasons) comes in degrees too and is proportional to the degree to which the agent is genealogically related to that individual. Call this "the *proportional* genealogically focused theory". This theory has different implications than the species-focused theory. According to the species-focused theory, I have an equally strong reason to promote the interests of all and only other humans (i.e., my conspecifics), whereas the proportional genealogically focused theory implies that there are stronger reasons for me to promote the interests of some humans than to promote the interests of other humans. And, according to the proportional genealogically focused theory, stronger genealogically grounded reasons exist for me regarding *chimpanzees* than regarding *parrots*, because of the different

[7] Perhaps genealogical relatedness or shared species membership grounds moral reasons that are more specific, or simply different, than general moral reasons to promote interests, e.g., a moral reason to avoid *harming* close genealogical relatives, or to prevent rights violations of close genealogical relatives, but not a reason to promote their interests generally.

degrees of relatedness that I share with these two groups of organisms. The species-focused theory, in contrast, does not imply that I have reasons regarding members of either group. Thus, the theories have different implications.

More generally, any genealogically focused theory that is *gradated*—i.e., that implies reasons with different degrees of strength—will have different implications than the species-focused theory; this is true because species membership is binary—it doesn't come in degrees.[8]

A second way of spelling out the genealogically focused theory yields a dichotomous version: There is a *particular degree* of genealogical relatedness that marks an important division.

Consider all possible pairs of human beings that are alive today. Each pair has an MRCA. Some pair of human beings alive today is such that no other pair is more distantly connected via an MRCA. Call the degree of genealogical relatedness that exists between this pair "the minimal degree of human genealogical relatedness."[9] All human beings alive today share at least this degree of genealogical relatedness with all other human beings alive today.

Now consider all possible pairs consisting of one living human being and one living animal. Further, consider the degree of relatedness that exists between the most closely related of these pairs. Call this degree of genealogical relatedness "the maximal degree of human-animal genealogical relatedness." All human beings alive today share *at most* this degree of genealogical relatedness with any living animal.

Consider a particular degree of relatedness, y, that is between *the maximal degree of human-animal genealogical relatedness* and *the minimal degree of human genealogical*

[8] The conspecific relationship is most likely a *vague* property, but that is different than coming in degrees.
[9] One estimate of the minimal degree of human genealogical relatedness is that the most distantly related living human beings are 50th cousins (Murchie, 1978).

relatedness—perhaps the midpoint between them. Now I can describe in more detail the second version of the genealogically focused theory: There exists a reason, grounded in genealogical relatedness, for all moral agents to promote the interests of all individuals with whom they share a degree of genealogical relatedness greater than or equal to y; further, moral agents' genealogically grounded reasons are *equally* strong regarding all individuals to whom they are related to at least degree y; and there are *no* genealogically grounded reasons for moral agents to promote the interests of those with whom they share a degree of genealogical relatedness less than y. Call this "the binary genealogically focused theory".

Contrast the binary genealogically focused theory with the species-focused theory from above. These theories have different implications because different species—and individual species over time—are not uniform in the degree of genealogical relatedness shared by their members.

First, imagine a species of intelligent, morally sensitive aliens. According to the species-focused theory, there are reasons, grounded in shared species membership, for moral agents of this species to promote the interests of all and only their conspecifics. But it's possible that either (i) some members of the alien species share a degree of relatedness that's less than y, or (ii) some members of the alien species share a degree of relatedness with members of a different species (say, from their planet) that's greater than y. If (i) is true, then the binary genealogically focused theory does *not* imply that there are reasons for *all* alien moral agents to promote the interests of *all* their conspecifics; if (ii) is true, then the binary genealogically focused theory implies there are reasons for some aliens to promote the interests of some non-conspecifics. Thus, the binary genealogically focused theory does not have the same implications as the species-focused theory.

Second, the degree of genealogical relatedness that exists between the most distantly related members of a species (e.g., human beings) may change over time. If, in the future, the most distantly related human beings share a degree of relatedness less than y, then there will be no genealogically grounded reasons for them to promote each other's interests, according to the binary genealogically focused theory. And, if a speciation event occurs within the human lineage such that some humans share with members of the new species a degree of relatedness greater than y, then there will be genealogically grounded reasons for those humans to promote the interests of some nonhumans. The species-focused theory has different implications in both cases.

So, the binary genealogically focused theory does not have the same implications as the species-focused theory.[10] (In the remainder of this section I'll focus on the proportional genealogically focused theory, but the discussion applies to the binary genealogically focused theory as well).

I've argued so far in this section that genealogically focused theories are distinct from species-focused theories. This means that claiming moral relevance for *genealogical relatedness* is distinct from claiming moral relevance for *shared species membership*. It is worthwhile to distinguish between these two moral positions for the following reason. As we attempt to identify what moral obligations human beings have towards animals, we should (among other things) consider, in its most defensible form, the argument that human beings have much stronger all-things-considered reasons regarding each other than they do regarding animals (I'll

[10] Perhaps there are other ways of spelling out a species-focused theory, or a way of spelling out a genealogically focused theory that allows for different levels of relatedness—different values for y—for different species, and for one species over time; so, perhaps there are consistent ways of filling in the details so that the two theories have the same implications. But, this section has covered the plausible ways of making a genealogically focused theory and a species-focused theory precise and shown that their implications differ.

use the terms "a Stronger-Reasons-for-Other-Humans-Argument" or "a SROH Argument" to refer to any argument with this conclusion), and thus that there is no tension in treating animals in ways in which it would be very wrong to treat other humans. We should do this simply because it's an instance of charitably considering all defensible positions on an important moral issue. Genealogical relatedness, *if it is in fact morally relevant*, can play a role in a SROH Argument, because *all* humans are more closely related genealogically to each other than they are to *any* animals. If genealogical relatedness grounds moral reasons in the way implied by the proportional genealogically focused theory, then all human moral agents have, in one respect, stronger reasons regarding all other humans than they do regarding any animal. Further, as I'll now discuss, an argument that appeals to genealogical relatedness is *more defensible* than other SROH Arguments that are commonly advanced.

The first reason that a genealogically based SROH argument is more defensible is that, as I'll discuss in Section 4, the premise that *genealogical relatedness* is morally relevant can be defended by asserting, first, the very plausible claim that *family members* have stronger reasons regarding each other, and, second, that part of the explanation of this fact is their genealogical relationship. No analogous defense is available for a SROH argument that appeals to the claim that *shared species membership* is morally relevant.

The second reason that a genealogically based argument is more defensible than other common SROH Arguments is that it provides an answer to the so-called "problem of marginal cases". A SROH Argument that appeals to particular *psychological capacities* (this argument is different than an argument based on shared species membership), does *not* imply that human moral agents have stronger reasons regarding those human beings who lack the relevant capacities—e.g., human beings with severe cognitive disabilities—than they do regarding

animals; it does not grant stronger moral protection to such human beings. In contrast, to repeat what I pointed out above, because all human moral agents are more closely genealogically related to *all* other human beings than they are to any animals (so far as the actual world in the present and near future is concerned), all human moral agents have stronger reasons regarding *all* other humans than they do regarding any animal, according to the proportional genealogically focused theory.

These two advantages of a *genealogically* based SROH Argument underline the importance of distinguishing genealogical relatedness from shared species membership and examining the moral relevance of genealogical relatedness.

In the following section I present a genealogically based SROH Argument.

Section 3: The Genealogical Argument

Here is what I'll call "the Genealogical Argument":

(A1) *The minimal degree of human genealogical relatedness* grounds a substantial reason for all moral agents regarding any other individual, P, to whom the agent is genealogically related, to that degree or to a greater degree.

(A2) *The maximal degree of human-animal genealogical relatedness* either grounds no reason at all for a moral agent who is related to another individual, P, to that degree or to a lesser degree, or grounds a reason that is substantially weaker than the reasons mentioned in (A1).

(A3) Therefore, at this point in time in the actual world, for every human moral agent, for every other human being, and for every animal, the genealogical relationship between the human moral agent and the human being grounds a substantial reason for the human moral agent regarding the human being, whereas the relationship between the human moral agent and the animal either grounds no reason at all for the human moral agent regarding the animal, or grounds a reason that is substantially weaker than the reason grounded by the human moral agent's genealogical relationship with the human being.

I will argue that premise (A1) is false.

Section 4: Analogy to Families, and Thought Experiments regarding Genealogical Relatedness

The claim that genealogical relatedness is morally relevant may be supported by common views about families.[11] It's very plausible that family members have stronger all-things-considered moral reasons regarding each other than do individuals who are not family members. Perhaps *part* of the explanation of this fact is, first, that family members are typically (though not always—as in many cases of adoption and foster parenting) very closely genealogically related to each other, and, second, that genealogical relatedness is a morally relevant feature. If the moral relevance of genealogical relatedness provides a good (though admittedly, partial) explanation of family members' stronger all-things-considered moral reasons regarding each other, then we have at least some reason to believe in the moral relevance of genealogical relatedness.

However, it is important to separate genealogical relatedness itself from features that often accompany it. At least in everyday examples, there are many facts about the relations between family members *other than genealogical relatedness* that might explain the plausible claim about family members' stronger all-things-considered reasons. Family members often have a very close personal (rather than merely genealogical) relationship with each other; parents arguably make an implicit but morally compelling commitment to their children; and children arguably incur a moral debt if they are raised by caring parents. These features are good candidates for explaining family members' stronger reasons, and so we are not forced to conclude, from the existence of family members' stronger reasons, that genealogical relatedness is morally relevant.

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[11] Elliott Sober suggested to me the analogy between the group of all humans and a family. Eva Feder Kittay (2005, p. 124) briefly draws this analogy. Roger Wertheimer (2005, p. 17) briefly suggests that shared species membership is importantly similar to relationships between siblings, or between parents and children. Finally, in discussing the moral status of fetuses, Gerald Paske writes, "…we are human and, hence, have both a right and an obligation to treat human entities in a special way even if those entities are not persons. In a sense this is species bias, but if it is thought of on the analogy of a family—the human family—it is quite reasonable. If the right to care is kept within legitimate bounds, the species bias that underlies it is quite reasonable. We may legitimately treat the members of our own family in special ways so long as our doing so does not violate the rights of other entities. Family members have claims on one another that others do not. So too with the human family." (2005, p. 82).

This overlap between genealogical relatedness and other morally relevant features suggests that one way to determine the moral relevance of genealogical relatedness *itself* is to imagine cases involving a genealogical relative—e.g., a biological sibling—with whom one shares *none* of these other kinds of connections; for example, a long-lost biological sibling with whom one has *no* personal history or relationship. We might ask, Do I have stronger reasons to help my long-lost biological sibling than to help a stranger who is in equal need of help? However, even if the correct answer to this question is "Yes, much stronger reasons," the truth of premise (A1) is still uncertain, for the following reason. Your long-lost biological sibling is *very closely* genealogically related to you. But premise (A1) claims that the minimal degree of human genealogical relatedness grounds substantial reasons. It is possible that very close genealogical relatedness grounds substantial reasons but that distant genealogical relatedness grounds much weaker reasons or no reasons at all. (See Section 6 for more on long-lost biological siblings).

Because of these two considerations about ascertaining the moral relevance of genealogical relatedness, I suggest that we consider cases like the following.

> *7th Cousin*: Someone shows up at your door one day, introducing himself as your 7th cousin (meaning that you the two of you have a common ancestor eight generations in the past, a great-great-great-great-great-great grandparent). The two of you have had no previous contact. You learn that he's in a very bad financial situation, through no fault of his own. You also learn that with a sizable loan, he's likely to extricate himself from the financial problem and continue living a satisfying life; without the loan from you there's a good chance his life will be significantly worse. You gain very strong evidence to support believing these features of the scenario. You also know that there are people in your 7th cousin's life who care about him (but can't help him financially) and who will be made worse off if his well-being suffers.
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> *Unrelated*: In many ways, the situation in *Unrelated* is the same as in *7th Cousin*: Someone you have had no previous contact with enters your life and you learn that you are able to prevent a substantial drop in this person's well-being with a sizable loan. However, the person in this case—call him "Unrelated"—has a very unusual backstory. Unrelated does not have human biological parents. He is an artifact of scientists who fabricated him from nonliving material, producing an

> organism that was at a developmental stage analogous to that of a human infant. (Thus, you have *no* ancestors in common with Unrelated; he is genealogically *unrelated* to you[12]). Several days after his creation, Unrelated was mistakenly routed into the adoption process, leading to Unrelated's placement with his adoptive parents. Knowledge of the circumstances of Unrelated's creation died with the scientists involved, and so even Unrelated is unaware of his unique origin. Unrelated's prospects in life when he came into existence were very much like those of your 7th cousin, and he has had a life that is very similar to your 7th cousin's to this point. And, also like your 7th cousin, there are other people who care about Unrelated and who will be upset and made worse off if his life goes substantially worse for him.

Do you have stronger all-things-considered reasons to help your 7th cousin than you do to help Unrelated? It seems to me obvious that the answer is "no"; your all-things-considered reasons have the same strength. In the following section, I explain why this judgment supports an objection to premise (A1).

Section 5: Why the Judgment regarding Your 7th Cousin Is Inconsistent with Premise (A1) of the Genealogical Argument

My first premise in the objection to (A1) is a claim about how the strength of genealogically grounded reasons (if such reasons exist) varies with the degree to which two individuals are genealogically related. The claim is this: The strength of genealogically grounded reasons is a *non-strictly decreasing function* of the genealogical distance between two individuals (call this "the Non-Strictly Decreasing Claim"). That is, if A is more closely genealogically related to B than to C, then the strength of A's genealogically grounded reasons regarding C is equal to or less than the strength of A's genealogically grounded reasons regarding B. The Non-Strictly Decreasing Claim rules out the possibility that reasons grounded in genealogical relatedness ever *increase* in strength as genealogical distance increases. This claim

[12] Assuming that life on Earth has a single origin, you are more closely related genealogically to *any* terrestrial organism than you are to Unrelated. This is true in spite of the fact that, physically and psychologically, Unrelated is indistinguishable from human beings, and in spite of the fact that, according to theories whose criterion for species membership is genetic, phenotypic, or reproductive, Unrelated *is* a human being.

is extremely plausible.[13]

The next premise in my objection to (A1) is that the degree of genealogical relatedness that exists between 7th cousins (call this "7th cousin relatedness") grounds, at most, *reasons of negligible strength*. I'll begin by returning to my judgment from the previous section: Your all-things-considered reasons to help your 7th cousin have the same strength as your all-things-considered reasons to help Unrelated. I think that that judgment is correct, but all I need to assume here is the weaker claim that the judgment is at least *approximately* correct, meaning that your all-things-considered reasons to help your 7th cousin are at most *negligibly* stronger than your all-things-considered reasons to help Unrelated. (Thus, my objection to (A1) would be unaffected by the concession that 7th cousin relatedness grounds very weak reasons). So, your all-things-considered reasons to help your 7th cousin are at most negligibly stronger than those to help Unrelated. But, in this pair of cases, all plausibly morally relevant features, with the exception of genealogical relatedness, are held equal. Because of this balance of morally relevant features, if 7th cousin relatedness *did* ground non-negligible reasons, your all-things-considered reasons to help your 7th cousin would be non-negligibly stronger than your all-things-considered reasons to help Unrelated. But (I am assuming here), my judgment in this case is at least approximately correct: You have *at most* negligibly stronger all-things-considered reasons to help your 7th cousin. Thus, 7th cousin relatedness does *not* ground non-negligible reasons; at most, it grounds reasons of negligible strength.

By itself, the Non-Strictly Decreasing Claim doesn't tell us anything about the strength of

[13] The Non-Strictly Decreasing Claim is consistent with two more specific views of how the strength of genealogically grounded reasons varies with genealogical distance. One view is that, no matter how great the genealogical distance, so long as one is in fact genealogically related to an individual, there is a genealogically grounded reason of some strength regarding that individual. The second view is that there exists a (perhaps vague) degree of genealogical relatedness after which genealogical relatedness becomes completely morally irrelevant. The Non-Strictly Decreasing Claim is consistent with both of these views, and also with the view that the reasons maintain the same strength as genealogical distance increases.

reasons that are grounded in any particular degree of genealogical relatedness. For example, it's consistent with the Non-Strictly Decreasing Claim that the minimal degree of human genealogical relatedness grounds enormously strong reasons. But when combined with the claim that 7th cousin relatedness grounds at most reasons of negligible strength, the Non-Strictly Decreasing Claim entails that, in all cases where genealogical distance is *greater than* that separating 7th cousins, the reasons grounded by such relatedness are at most of negligible strength. And this entailment is inconsistent with premise (A1) of the Genealogical Argument: (A1) posits *substantial* reasons even when the degree of relatedness is as small as that which exists between the two most distantly related living human beings (undoubtedly smaller than 7th cousin relatedness). So, the Non-Strictly Decreasing Claim is true, 7th cousin relatedness grounds at most reasons of negligible strength, and therefore premise (A1) of the Genealogical Argument is false.

Section 6: The Valuable Social Norm View

Imagine a case similar to *7th Cousin*, in which it is your long-lost *brother* who shows up at your door. You have had no contact with him previously, nor did either of you know of the other's existence, and thus none of the features that usually accompany families (e.g., shared history, implicit commitments) are present. I think, and suspect many will agree, that you have substantially stronger all-things-considered reasons regarding your long-lost brother than you do regarding Unrelated. Let's assume that this judgment is correct. One might use this example to construct the following objection to my position.

The objection begins by asking what accounts for your stronger reasons regarding your long-lost brother. One possibility is that this *very close* genealogical relatedness grounds substantial moral reasons. As I mentioned in Section 4, this possibility is consistent with the

claim that 7th cousin relatedness grounds at most reasons of negligible strength; it's possible that the strength of reasons grounded by genealogical relatedness drops off sharply as genealogical distance moves from siblings to 7th cousins. So, the concession that close genealogical relatedness grounds substantial moral reasons is not a decisive objection to my argument against premise (A1). But, such a concession does imply that *some* degrees of genealogical relatedness ground non-negligible moral reasons, and perhaps that claim makes somewhat more plausible the claim that distant genealogical relatedness also grounds non-negligible moral reasons.

In this section, I will attempt to undermine this objection in a different way (that is, different than insisting that the substantial moral relevance of close genealogical relatedness does not imply the substantial moral relevance of distant genealogical relatedness). I will present a general theory about when one has stronger reasons regarding genealogical relatives. This theory, which I'll call "the Valuable Social Norm View," provides an alternative explanation of the correct judgment in the case of your long-lost brother (the first explanation being that very close relatedness *itself* grounds non-negligible moral reasons). The Valuable Social Norm View explains those stronger reasons in terms of how one's actions strengthen or erode established ways of treating genealogical relatives, and in terms of the aggregate effects of these norms. If this view provides a compelling explanation of the judgment regarding your long-lost brother, then that case no longer supports the view that close genealogical relatedness *itself* grounds substantial moral reasons (or any moral reasons at all).

But, the Valuable Social Norm View may raise a new problem for my position. If the explanation that I give of stronger reasons regarding your long-lost brother *also* implies that one has stronger reasons regarding distant genealogical relatives (e.g. 7th cousins), then this explanation would undermine my argument for the claim that distant genealogical relatedness is

at most negligibly morally relevant. So, I will also explain why the valuable social norm explanation of stronger reasons for *close* genealogical relatives does not imply stronger reasons for *distant* genealogical relatives. Now I'll present the Valuable Social Norm View.

Consider how a consequentialist might defend the claim that I ought to help my close friend, rather than helping a stranger, despite the fact that the stranger is in greater need of help and so the immediate gain in aggregate value, if I help the stranger, will be greater than if I help my friend. The consequentialist might point out that I will feel guilty for violating a norm of friendship, my friend will feel wronged, and our friendship, which has certain psychological benefits, will suffer. These facts are clearly relevant to the consequentialist calculation. This means that, just considering the well-being of my friend, the stranger, and me, the consequentialist may say that I should help my friend. There's a further consequentialist consideration. If I help the stranger in this scenario, I will chip away at a social norm of friendship: I will reduce the shared expectation that friends generally privilege each other's interests. In contrast, if I help my friend, I will be actively promoting that social norm. Since this social norm produces psychological benefits in society as a whole, the fact that helping the stranger will erode that norm counts against helping the stranger. So, even if the gain in the stranger's well-being outweighs the negative psychological consequences for my friend and me, there's a possible consequentialist argument for helping my friend. To summarize: Performing the action that helps my friend may be justified, from a consequentialist perspective, because of the psychological effects on those immediately involved, and because of my influence on others' behavior, which will have its own psychological consequences.[14]

[14] The *psychological* benefits of friendship are the most obvious. But, according to defensible theories of well-being and of non-instrumental value more generally, friendship itself contributes to well-being and to impersonal value, independent of its psychological effects. Likewise, friendship may promote physical health, and perhaps physical health is itself prudentially or impersonally valuable. Moving forward, I'll refer just to the psychological benefits of

I'll use "Stronger Reasons for Close Relatives" to refer to a social norm (by which I mean a consensus view about appropriate behavior) of giving substantially greater weight to the interests of one's close genealogical relatives (e.g., siblings), and I'll use "No Stronger Reasons for Distant Relatives" to refer to a social norm of giving *no* greater weight to the interests of one's distant genealogical relatives (e.g., 7th cousins). A social norm that is inconsistent with No Stronger Reasons for Distant Relatives is what I'll call "Slightly Stronger Reasons for Distant Relatives"; this is the social norm of giving slightly greater weight to the interests of distant genealogical relatives. Now I'll argue, first, that the consequentialist considerations mentioned above support acting in conformity with Stronger Reasons for Close Relatives and, second, that they support acting in conformity with No Stronger Reasons for Distant Relatives (and thus *not* acting in conformity with Slightly Stronger Reasons for Distant Relatives).[15]

Consider the following claim about human psychology: Having (at least) a small number of people who care about you very much and who substantially privilege your interests above those of others (and whom you treat in a similar way) is very psychologically beneficial. This claim supports acting in conformity with Stronger Reasons for Close Relatives. By conforming to Stronger Reasons for Close Relatives (i.e., by habitually privileging the interests of your close relatives), you promote the psychological benefits just mentioned for the close relatives affected, and for your yourself. Further, your actions affect those not immediately involved: Your actions strengthen, in a very small way, the social norm of privileging close relatives, which bestows psychological benefits on those who participate in it. Of course, conforming to Stronger Reasons

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friendship and other relationships, recognizing that these relationships themselves may be non-instrumentally valuable and may have non-psychological effects that are non-instrumentally valuable.

[15] This defense of Stronger Reasons for Close Relatives and No Stronger Reasons for Distant Relatives doesn't depend on the truth of consequentialism. Even moral theories that posit deontological constraints and moral options to fail to maximize value may hold that we have *some* moral reasons for promoting the good. Any theory of this sort can incorporate the kind of defense I'm outlining here.

for Close Relatives will sometimes be non-optimal in a local way: On a particular occasion, my choice to spend time or money in a way that benefits family members rather than using those resources to help a stranger in great need may not maximize value, if we consider only the value of the stranger having his basic needs met, my positive impact on my family members, and everyone's feelings about my action. But, there's a strong case to be made that conforming to Stronger Reasons for Close Relatives is nevertheless supported by consequentialist considerations, because the prevalence of that social norm is value maximizing in the long term.[16]

Here is an objection to the claim that I have reason to conform to Stronger Reasons for Close Relatives. The objection begins by pointing out that this norm is not an *ideal* social norm for achieving the psychological benefits mentioned above. This is because, even if it is followed universally, Stronger Reasons for Close Relatives does *not* ensure that everyone gains this benefit, because some people have no close genealogical relatives. An ideal social norm for achieving these benefits would be more inclusive—it would ensure that *everyone* is part of a small, highly partial group. The person making this objection might point to a different social norm, which is more inclusive than Stronger Reasons for Close Relatives, and claim that the consequentialist reasons mentioned above support conforming to *that* norm.

The response to this objection depends on whether the proposed norm is consistent or inconsistent with Stronger Reasons for Close Relatives. One kind of more inclusive norm would result from simply supplementing Stronger Reasons for Close Relatives in a particular way; for example: One has a moral reason to invite those with no close genealogical relatives into one's highly partial group, as long as this will not disrupt the group. In that case, the objector has not given a reason for failing to conform to Stronger Reasons for Close Relatives; she has simply

[16] Peter Railton's discussion (1984) of consequentialism is relevant to this issue.

given a reason for supplementing it and conforming to that amended norm. On the other hand, the objector might propose an inclusive norm that is inconsistent with Stronger Reasons for Close Relatives—a way of organizing people into small, highly partial groups that does not mention genealogical connections at all. But in that case, the fact (Burnstein, 1994) that Stronger Reasons for Close Relations is an *entrenched* norm counts against the proposed, more inclusive norm. Others will be much less likely to follow your example in conforming to an innovative but more inclusive norm than they will to follow your example in conforming to an entrenched norm; thus, your example will promote the relevant psychological benefits to a much lesser degree. (And, perhaps, your resolve to follow this kind of more inclusive norm may not overcome your own entrenched inclinations). For these reasons, the fact that Stronger Reasons for Close Relatives is not an *ideal* social norm for delivering the psychological benefits in question is not a strong objection to the claim that one has reason to conform to it.

Having defended the claim that we have reason to conform to Stronger Reasons for Close Relatives, I'll turn to No Stronger Reasons for Distant Relatives. Consider a further claim about human psychology: Having a large number of people who care about you in a minor way and who slightly privilege your interests above those of others is psychologically beneficial. This claim may be true. My argument would be easier if it could be refuted, but my argument doesn't require this. Suppose this claim is true: Humans do benefit psychologically from being part of a wide network whose members privilege their interests in a minor way. Given this claim, is Slightly Stronger Reasons for Distant Relatives a valuable social norm? Slightly Stronger Reasons for Distant Relatives is a valuable norm only if the psychological benefits of the norm outweigh the cost in aggregate value that comes from privileging the interests of distant relatives in a minor way, when doing so does not maximize value (locally speaking). To illustrate this

point, suppose that just two people (my 7th cousin and I) adopt Slightly Stronger Reasons for Distant Relatives (for the moment, ignore the fact that our behavior may influence whether *others* conform to Slightly Stronger Reasons for Distant Relatives). Suppose I must choose between helping my 7th cousin, who is moderately well-off, and helping a needy, but even more distant, relative, who falls outside the scope of Slightly Stronger Reasons for Distant Relatives. What do the consequentialist considerations mentioned above suggest about my reasons in this case (and his reasons if the roles are reversed)? They support conforming to Slightly Stronger Reasons for Distant Relatives *only if* the psychological benefits of our regular adherence to that norm outweigh the immediate loss in value that occurs when we fail to help more needy, but more distant, relatives. Do the psychological benefits to me and my 7th cousin of knowing that we will each privilege the other's interests slightly above those of more distant relatives outweigh the losses in immediate aggregate value that come from doing so? While recognizing that these issues can only be decided conclusively in an empirical way, I suggest that the psychological benefits of this loose social bond are so slight that it is unlikely that they outweigh the loses in immediate aggregate value. Turning from *our* conformity to Stronger Reasons for Distant Relatives to the larger social norm (which our behavior may promote or erode), I suggest that a similar claim is true: It is unlikely that the psychological benefits of Slightly Stronger Reasons for Distant Relatives are large enough to make this norm a valuable social norm.

In summary, I make two claims about social norms involving genealogical relatives. First, it is unlikely that the psychological benefits of Slightly Stronger Reasons for Distant Relatives are large enough to make this norm a valuable social norm. Second, in contrast, it seems plausible that the psychological benefits of Stronger Reasons for Close Relatives do outweigh the losses in immediate aggregate value that will result from general adherence to this norm. The

crucial difference, I claim, is that human beings receive substantial psychological benefits from being part of a *small, highly partial group*, and they receive negligible psychological benefits from being part of a *large, slightly partial group*. Thus, a valuable social norm regarding genealogical relatives is one that includes Stronger Reasons for Close Relatives, *and* No Stronger Reasons for Distant Relatives. I have stronger reasons for helping my long-lost brother, but no stronger reasons for helping my 7th cousin, because of the immediate psychological consequences of these actions, and because of the psychological consequences of the social norms that these actions exemplify.

Section 7: Conclusion

Theories that assign moral relevance to shared species membership are importantly different from theories that assign moral relevance to genealogical relatedness. In this paper, I've articulated and objected to an indirectly speciesist argument according to which genealogical relatedness is morally relevant.

The claim that genealogical relatedness is morally relevant seems to draw support from the fact that family members, who have stronger moral reasons regarding each other than do individuals who are not family members, are typically closely genealogically related. We should ask whether those stronger reasons are partially grounded in genealogical relatedness *itself*, rather than in external features that tend to accompany shared family membership; and we should ask whether *distant* genealogical relatedness grounds any reasons of non-negligible strength.

I've argued against the claim that genealogical relatedness of the kind linking all human beings grounds substantial reasons. My first argument appeals to intuitions in two carefully matched contrast cases. My second argument appeals to a theory about valuable social norms that surround some genealogical relationships but not others. These arguments support the claim

that one cannot use the fact that all humans are more closely genealogically related to all other humans than they are to any animal to justify the harms we cause animals that would be wrong if inflicted upon distantly related strangers.

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