



COLLOQUIUM SERIES

“Just Flourishing in the Interspecies Community”

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Domestic animals are deeply vulnerable to exploitation by humans. Their vulnerability to and dependence on humans, while variant in degree, is typically regarded as an essential and deliberate feature of their existence. Having few or no opportunities for living well independently of humans, domestic animals are now recognized by some scholars as being owed a robust form of membership in the mixed community. As a general approach to justice for domestic animals, what I will refer to as the membership model is both attractive and plausible. What it lacks is a satisfying account of just flourishing. Supplying such an account will require attention to variance in the capability of just flourishing among different kinds of beings, and the conflicting obligations that may arise from that variance. I argue that some difficulties with just flourishing result from what I refer to as the problem of harmful needs. Harmful needs, as I conceive of them, are essential to and reliably instantiated in certain forms of life; as such they may preclude the possibility for the mutually realized flourishing in which a good and just society consists. This leads me to claim, contra Sue Donaldson and Will Kymlicka, that certain kinds of domestic animals may be legitimately excluded from membership. If this argument is correct, we are left with a serious ethical dilemma. Some of the domestic animals who we have brought into our community, and who are therefore owed distinctive obligations of care, cannot be included as members of a just interspecies community without jeopardizing the rights of other members. In a separate paper, I review and assess some of the possible responses to this dilemma; here I engage in the prior task of identifying the nature of the dilemma, and the sorts of ethical concepts and approaches we need to address it. I will argue in particular for an account of just flourishing and of harmful needs that is rooted in an ethical naturalist tradition.

Friday, November 14th, 2014

Room: 3228 River Building

Time: 3:00 pm

All are welcome!