

PIGS IN SPACE

Tom Regan

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Fans of "The Muppets" television program will recognize the title of this essay. A regular segment of that program was called "pigs in Space". The perils and amorous adventures of Miss Piggy were featured prominently, but she was hardly alone in her journeys beyond the bounds of the earth. She traveled with rambunctious porcine companions.

Miss Piggy's star has dimmed if not quite fallen with the passage of time, but her celebrity is still remembered fondly by those who knew her. Of course we realized how much of a story we were being asked to believe: Pigs in space, flying about in sophisticated space ships to unchartered galaxies, dressed to the teeth in the latest line of designer space wear, experts in the use of marvelous technologies. Really! Even those who lacked a robust sense of reality recognized this science as fiction, albeit of the delightful sort, with happy endings all around, Miss Piggy in particular emerging triumphant and viewers the better for it.

There is, however, a different meaning our title might have. Suppose that an astronaut has landed on some distant planet and is in the midst of exploring it. We, who remain on earth, are in radio contact with our pioneer. Imagine the following conversation.

Astronaut: The vegetation is much like what we have back in North Carolina. And the air seems amazingly like our own.

Us: Anything else familiar?

Astronaut: Wait a minute! There are some things moving in a clearing up ahead. I think ...

Us: Yes?

Astronaut: They're ...

Us: Yes?

Astronaut: My God! There are pigs in space!

Well, this bit of fantasy might be as far removed from fact as Miss Piggy's landing the space shuttle. In the realm of possibi-

lities, however, it is more likely that we will someday *find* pigs in space than that they will *fly there* themselves. More likely still is it that we will someday find animals like pigs in some, though not all, respects. For example, the animals we someday discover might not have snouts or tails like the pigs we know, yet they might have similar needs (for example, they might forage for food). But for our purposes let us assume that the animals the astronaut in our story comes upon really are indistinguishable, in terms of appearance, anatomy, physiology and behavior, from terrestrial pigs. When he says, "There are pigs in space!" in other words, let us assume that what he says is accurate.

Aside from the initial incredulity with which the news is received, what would our likely reactions be? Certainly finding pigs in space would whet any scientist's appetite for discovery. How did they get there? What other forms of plant and animal life are there, and how can the pigs' presence be explained in relation to these other life forms? We can imagine the gushing forth of scientific (not to mention theological!) curiosity and enthusiasm for our astronaut's find. There would be no problem selling tickets on the next star ship destined for (let us give our imaginary planet a name) Sty.

Scientists and theologians are surely not the only ones who would be eager to get a seat. Entrepreneurs of many a shade and description would vie with them for space. Just think of the possibilities: "First Photos of the Pigs From Sty On Sale Here!" "First Pig From Sty on Exhibit Here: Pay As You Enter!" "Ears From the Pigs of Sty Make Perfect Stocking Stuffers!" "You Ain't Et Ribs 'Til you Et Ribs From The Pigs of Sty!" Our imaginary pigs would seem to be the dream child of the free market. Where there is a demand, there also shall there be a supply. Those early space ships to Sty are likely to be quite crowded indeed. If there is money to be made from the discovery of this new resource, who could blame anyone from making it?

Familiar grounds for blame are easy enough to imagine. If someone gets a business going in pigs from Sty as a result of force, or deceit, or a deftly placed bribe, we are unlikely to look upon the enterprise benignly. Less familiar grounds concern the justice of the exploitation of these previously unowned resources. The people who will have the financial means and technology to bring back pigs from Sty, alive or otherwise, will operate from advantages they themselves may have done nothing to earn. Suppose they have come by their money as a result of a bountiful inheritance and happen to be lucky enough to live in the nation from which the astronaut hails. Should they be allowed to add to their riches while poor people on earth go starving? More fundamentally,

should we allow unregulated free market forces to control the exploitation of these newly discovered resources, the pigs from Sty, or should we, because justice requires it, establish a global consortium, of the sort favored by advocates of the Treaty of the Sea,¹ an impartial international organization charged with the task of insuring that the peoples of the earth share equitably in the benefits from exploiting these porcine resources? Though a less familiar consideration, this last one would certainly occur to many people, and a failure to implement an egalitarian "Treaty of the Stars", shall we say, would be looked upon by them as a very good reason to blame those enterprising entrepreneurs who would amass the benefits for themselves. One thing most people, both those who favor unrestrained trade in pigs from Sty and those who favor a more equitable global policy, would not stop to question is whether these animals *are resources for us*, out there, so to speak, for the picking. How we distribute the benefits that accrue from managing these resources, in other words, is certain to generate heated moral debate. But whether we do wrong or are blameworthy if we view and treat these animals *as our resources*, what value they have to be measured exclusively in terms of how they answer or advance human interests, that is far less likely to be a question that gets seriously raised let alone seriously answered. It is this question that will occupy our serious attention in what follows.

The case for viewing and treating the pigs from Sty as such a resource cannot be any stronger than the case for viewing and treating terrestrial pigs analogously. That we humans tend to view and treat these latter animals as a resource for us needs little argument. Their major human utility is as food. An estimated two hundred million hogs are slaughtered annually in the United States. We know them mostly as ham, chops, bacon, ribs, and assorted luncheon meats and sausage. But nothing is lost or wasted in the ideal processing plant (people both wear and pass "the old pig-skin", for example); as the witty fellows say, "The only thing we don't use is the squeal--and we're working on that!"

Some people have questioned the wisdom of eating pork. Because of the extensive use of chemicals and drugs in commercial animal agriculture, including growth stimulants, antibiotics, disinfectants, and preservatives, some public health advocates claim the people run serious health risks when they eat *any* meat. For example, the stored remnants of antibiotics are consumed, so it is claimed, along with the barbecue and Mooshi pork, with the result that "wonder drugs" of only a few years ago are increasingly inefficacious because unwittingly over-consumed.²

These health worries, though important, do not challenge the

propriety of viewing and treating pigs as a resource for us. To question whether people act *prudentially* by eating pigs is not to question whether "a pig's role in the scheme of things", so to speak, is to be eaten by us. Similarly off-target is a worry of another sort. The image of the contented pig slopping around in mud both lush and bountiful is as faithful to the life style of the modern pig as a Millet painting of weary peasant farmers is to the modern farmer tooling about his fields in his air conditioned, wired-for stereo combine. The modern pig lives indoors in a climate-controlled environment; *mud* is an unthinkable aberration of the production process. Sometimes kept in total isolation, these animals are more commonly raised in small groups of varying sizes. Their natural urges to forage, to cool themselves off in the mud, to romp--these and many other behavioral inclinations find no outlet in the modern factory farm. The name of the game is money, which means raising these animals in close confinement, speeding up their rate of growth, and turning them over as quickly as the economics of the system dictate. Here is a case, not unique by any means, where the farmer either gets big--or gets out.

The harms visited upon hogs and other animals raised in close confinement have occasioned vocal objections on the part of champions of animal welfare. One can perhaps understand, even if one cannot agree with, the judgment of the nineteenth century Jesuit Joseph Rickaby, when he classifies animals such as pigs as of the order of "sticks and stones".³ Except for closet Cartesians, however, no one today believes that, like sticks and stones, pigs are utterly bereft of a mental life, or that what we do to them makes no difference to the quality of life as lived and experienced by them. Unless we suppose, to borrow Voltaire's biting reply to the Cartesians of his day, that "nature (has) arranged all the means of feeling in the animal so that it may not feel",⁴ the case for attributing a mental life to such animals as pigs is as firmly rooted in reason and common sense as is the conductor's attributing a mental life to the commuters on the D Train to Brooklyn. That modern, factory farms cause pigs psychological distress, frustration, and discomfort are, then, not fabrications of loosely wired "animal lovers" but the inevitable costs (for the pigs) of the intensive pursuit of benefits (for the farmer and, perhaps, the consumer).

Proponents of animal welfare find these "costs" unacceptable, and they actively campaign for a variety of reforms, including more space, greater access to natural environments, and so on. To raise farm animals as they are currently raised, these reformers claim, is morally wrong, and the reforms they advocate, they say, are morally imperative.⁵

Such reforms, if instituted, would change some things but not others. If they were instituted, the quality of life of the average ("modern") terrestrial pig, let us agree, would be improved. It is difficult to imagine how anyone could be against *that*! But these reforms, however salutary they might be, really would not alter the view that pigs exist as a resource for us. The (improved) life of these animals *still* would be routinely terminated (they would, that is, be killed) whenever it was thought to serve human interests to do so and, assuming the demand for pork and pork products remained in force, the place in the production process vacated by the deceased animal would *continue* to be taken by a member of the next generation of pigs, and so on, as the system of production is repeated. Even with more space per animal, more natural environments, and the like, these farm animals who live and move and have their being in the commercial animal agriculture we know would continue to be viewed and treated as a *domesticated renewable resource*. So (and here we make contact again with our imaginary pigs from Sty) if reforms of the sort described are as far as we morally ought to go in changing current practices in terrestrial hog production, then the moral parameters concerning how we may or ought to treat extraterrestrial pigs would be before us as well. Like terrestrial pigs, we ought not to allow the development of farming practices on Sty that make the pigs pay a heavy price in terms of their psychological distress, discomfort, and frustration. Morally, however, it could not be any more wrong to view and treat *these* animals as a renewable resource (to be raised in the name of human interests, killed in the name of human interests, sold in the name of human interests, and so on) than it is to do this in the case of terrestrial pigs. Thus would the moral stamp of approval be given to allowing aspirant hog farmers a seat on the next shuttle to Sty.

But there is, as Socrates might put the point, "a small problem. Suppose our moral vision concerning terrestrial pigs is impoverished. Then we certainly cannot rely on that vision as a basis for providing a morally enlightened basis for how extraterrestrial pigs ought to be treated. And it does seem, to some if not to all, that our vision borders on blindness here. True, we recognize that pigs are not "of the order of sticks and stones"; we agree that they have a mental life, so that, for example, we can both understand and verify the statement, "That hurts the pig". But to accept this much and nothing more is to see the shadow and miss the substance of a pig's mental life. More than recorders of hedonic pluses (pleasures) and minuses (pains), terrestrial pigs are reasonably viewed as complex mental creatures. Anyone who is

conversant in, say, English understands what it means to say of a tethered sow, for example, "She's frustrated". Frustration, however, is not possible in the absence of desire: one cannot be frustrated because one cannot do something if one does not have the desire to do it. And such a desire (that is, the desire to break free) is not possible in the absence of belief: One cannot desire to break free if one does not believe that one is restrained. So beliefs and desires, not just pleasures and pains, are intelligibly attributable to terrestrial pigs, as are emotions ("She's really angry now!") and agency, understood as purposive or intentional action ("She wants to get in the mud to cool off".) Pigs, then, are not objects--*things*. Like us, they bring *subjectivity* to the world: They are the experiencing subjects of a life that, over time, fares better or worse for them *as individuals*, and to understand them and their welfare requires recognizing them as the sophisticated mental creatures that they are. It was not for naught that pigs rather naturally assumed the role of leaders in Orwell's *Animal Farm*.

These are alternative ways to challenge this (what some might regard as a too generous) view of porcine mental life. The first is to say that those who accept it are guilty of being anthropomorphic, attributing to nonhumans characteristics that belong to humans only. This charge settles nothing and is, in fact, question-begging. Whether desires, beliefs, emotions, and so on *are* the exclusive property of human beings is precisely the question at issue, and we are not given the slightest reason for believing that we are unique in these respects by a clever critic's having recourse to the tired accusation that those who think otherwise are "anthropomorphizers".

A second challenge is more sophisticated. It consists in urging that the object of belief (that is, *what* one believes) is the truth of the sentence expressing the belief, a position that implies that belief is possible only for those individuals who are able to formulate and understand sentences. Yonder sow, alas, lacks linguistic competence of the sort required and so on this view cannot believe anything; and since desires and emotions, let us assume (as proponents of this challenge do⁶), presuppose beliefs, she cannot desire anything or feel any emotions either. Only human beings, among terrestrial creatures at least, can have beliefs, desires, emotions, and so on. We therefore are guilty of anthropomorphizing when we speak of the sow as if she *actually* feels frustrated or angry, or as if she *actually* wants loose.

Though more sophisticated than the first, this second challenge lacks credibility. Among the objections one should press is that it implies that human children, before they are able to formulate

and understand sentences, cannot believe anything; assuming, then, as those who mount this challenge do, that emotions and desires are not possible in the absence of beliefs, these children are similarly incapable of wanting anything or feeling any emotion. This view deserves a name. "The Bachelor Fallacy" is apposite, since only bachelors and others who have not been around young children much *could* suppose that the young are Lockean blank slates before they learn to speak. Indeed, the Bachelor Fallacy itself actually entails that children never *can* learn a language or believe anything. Instruction in language is a two way street between teacher and learner; unless the learner contributes some pre-verbal (and thus non-verbal) beliefs to the enterprise, instruction cannot get under way. By identifying sentences as necessary constituents of the object of belief, however, the Bachelor Fallacy precludes the possibility that children *can* have pre-verbal beliefs and, in doing so, also precludes the possibility of their ever learning a language or coming to believe anything. It must be an odd analysis of belief that itself makes belief impossible.

A third objection, and the last of this sort we can consider here, is that we can explain the behavior of pigs more simply without attributing beliefs, desires, and so on to them than if we allow such attributions. For reasons of parsimony or simplicity, therefore, we ought not to make these unnecessary assumptions about the minds of porkers.⁷ Now, this third challenge, if sound, would prove too much rather than too little. If pig behavior can be parsimoniously explained without having recourse to beliefs, desires, and the like, why would not the same be true of human behavior. If the sow's angry behavior, for example, is merely a mechanical "response" to internal or external "stimuli", then how is the jealous lover's angry behavior any different? If we reject, as one must assume we do, the adequacy of a stimulus-response account of all human behavior, and in view of the (among other reasons)⁸ behavioral similarity between angry sows and angry humans, there is no good reason to deny and quite good reason to affirm that much of the sow's behavior is best explained in the same kind of way as much of human behavior—namely, by making reference to individual beliefs, desires, emotions, intentions, and so on.

To credit pigs with a comparatively sophisticated mental life is hardly new. It is in the spirit of Darwin who claimed repeatedly that the psychology of such creatures differs in degree, not in kind, from our own.⁹ Any rationally viable ethic of how pigs *ought* to be treated must therefore take their mental sophistication into account. And it is the demonstrable failure to do this that exposes the grave inadequacy of that "ethic" that allows these animals

to be treated as a renewable resource for us, their "value" to be measured exclusively in terms of their utility relative to our interests. Just as Bonnie is not (in this sense) a resource for Clyde, nor Clyde for Bonnie, so pigs are not (in this sense) a resource for us--though of course they can be, and almost always are treated as if this is "their place in the scheme of things". That we are, so to speak, on all fours with pigs on this morally crucial matter will be seen more clearly once we reflect on the philosophical underpinnings of why we do, and should, deny that human beings are mere resources.

In our case we avoid this impoverished view by postulating that we have a different kind of value. Sometimes this is said to be our worth, or our dignity, or our sanctity; sometimes, as in Kant's writings, the root idea is expressed by saying that human beings exist as "ends in themselves".¹⁰ Let us here call the kind of independent, non-resource value attributed to individual humans *inherent value*. It is because we have such value that we must *not* be treated in ways that fail to show respect for us as individuals, and respect is not shown whenever we are treated in ways that assume that our value is reducible to how much we answer to or advance the interests of others--as if, that is, we exist as a resource for others. Acts and institutions that fail to treat us with appropriate respect are morally to be condemned. Or so it is commonly believed. Were we to grant this much, how could we rationally avoid the same view about the value of pigs? How could we rationally defend, that is, the view that we do, whereas pigs do not, have this special kind of value--inherent value?

Many possibilities come to mind: Pigs lack immortal souls. Pigs lack moral autonomy and reason. Pigs lack the ability to enter into contracts. Pigs lack the ability to recognize the inherent value of others. Pigs lack the ability to choose between alternative life-plans. And so on. All these claims can be granted, for argument's sake, since they neither singly nor collectively provide a rationally satisfactory basis for affirming inherent value in our case while denying it in the case of pigs. For example, even if it is true that we do, but pigs do not, have immortal souls, nothing whatever follows concerning the sort of value each of us has during our terrestrial (or, as in the case of the pigs from Sty, their extraterrestrial) sojourn. Again, that pigs lack the ability to recognize the inherent value of others is no better reason to deny that they have such value than it would be to say that a daffodil cannot be yellow because it lacks the ability to recognize that lemons are yellow too. And as for the other sorts of considerations mentioned (for example, that pigs lack, but humans possess, autonomy and reason), each conveniently overlooks

the fact that *many* human beings, including young children, the senile, and the mentally enfeebled of all ages, are similarly deficient. Yet we do not, and one can only hope that we will not, view and treat these human beings as if they exist as a renewable resource for those of us who, as luck has it, happen to possess the list of favored attributes under review. To persist in viewing and treating pigs, creatures who, it bears emphasizing, have a mental life of greater sophistication than many human beings, as if they exist as a renewable resource here for us, their value to be measured exclusively in terms of how much they answer to and advance human interests, while denying that the same is true in the case of these humans--to persist in doing this is neither rationally nor morally defensible. Rationally, we are inconsistent in judging relevantly similar cases in dissimilar ways; morally we are prejudiced because we draw moral boundaries on the basis of a morally biased consideration (namely, species membership), a tragic moral failing in the case of our dealings with animals that is not unlike other failings, such as racism and sexism, in our dealings with one another. For just as the moral status and value of a human being does not turn on such biological considerations as race and sex, so the moral status and value of an individual, whether human or pig, does not turn on the different biological consideration of species membership.¹¹

One common objection to the foregoing is worth considering.¹² Though young children, the senile, and mentally defective human beings lack moral autonomy and reason, for example, they are, we are told, the objects of the sentimental interests of other human beings who have these attributes. Thus, for example, young children are loved by their parents, and the senile by their children. So, this objection continues, we ought not to treat these dependent humans as "our resources", not because we would thereby be doing anything wrong to them if we did; the wrong we would be guilty of would be a wrong done to their interested relatives. As far as animals are concerned, similar prohibitions, grounded in human sentimental interests, apply if (and only if) such interests are present, which is why we are not at liberty to treat pet animals, for example, much loved by their owners as they are, as if they are, say, a culinary resource here for the rest of us. Pigs, however, whether terrestrial or extraterrestrial, do not occupy the same happy position within the lap of human affection, which is why we are at liberty to treat them as our resources.

Aside from the overly rosy picture this objection paints of human filial relations (for many a parent does not love his or her child, and many a child does not love his or her parents, senile or otherwise) this objection does not so much address the charges

of inconsistency and prejudice leveled earlier as it invites them. According to this objection, we are not to view and treat as our resources those individuals who occupy a secure place in the sentimental interests of others. Pigs, however, not to mention many other species of animals, happen not to be favored or protected by the roll of our sentimental dice. But if we pause to ask *why* this is so, it turns out that, accustomed as most people are to the comfortable social habits of the day, people just don't care much about what happens to pigs, including whether they are treated as renewable resources, because--well, because most people think pigs are renewable resources! Our "sentiments" in this case, in other words, are themselves a product of our culture's dominant misconception of what pigs are and how they may be treated: *They exist for us, to promote our interests.* How lame, then, to appeal to the absence of "sentimental interests" toward pigs as a way to answer the charges of inconsistency and prejudice. That these feelings are absent, when they are, is itself a symptom of the inconsistency and prejudice at issue.

There is an obvious way around these charges of prejudice and inconsistency: give up the belief in our own inherent value. That is an option that will tempt some, but few on reflection will give in. And a good thing too. For the moral theory we would be obliged to put in the place of one that recognizes *our* independent, non-resource value--one or another form of utilitarianism, for example, or alternative versions of egoism or contractarianism--that theory will prove to be weak at the joints, unable to stand up under the weight of sustained, fair, and informed criticism.¹³ So we do well not to make a shambles of our theoretical understanding of *interhuman* right and wrong (a failure common to the sorts of theories just mentioned) in order to avoid recognizing our prejudice and inconsistency when it comes to the value of individuals beyond our species' borders. We do well, that is, to expand our moral vision rather than to settle for less than the best.

Here, then, let us imagine, we can see the jostling ticket buyers, each intent upon booking passage on the next flight to Sty. Toward the front of the line we can see representatives of commercial animal agriculture and, at their head, the power brokers of hog farming, eager to investigate the economic feasibility of exporting terrestrial animal know-how to another planet. In this not impossible story let us hope that, if not us, our children will step forward to bar the way to these foreign investors. Let us hope they will be told, "Your money is not wanted. The wrong you now plan to do to pigs in space is the same wrong our parents did to pigs on earth. The pigs on Sty are no more to be viewed and treated as 'a resource for us' than the hogs on the farms in

eastern North Carolina were for them”.

Whether we will some day find pigs or other relevantly similar animals in space, we do not know. And how we should decide whether any of those alien life forms we might one day discover are relevantly like the pigs we know--have, that is, a mental life of the kind and sophistication these animals have--that, too, we might not know at present. What we do know is that more than science and technology will be on board the star ships of the future. Human prejudice, if left unchallenged, will have a place. Slumbering vices, especially those that allow the morally comfortable exploitation of the weak by the strong, will export well if left unaroused. That we do wrong--*now*--by treating terrestrial pigs (and other animals caught in the grip of commercial animal agriculture) as renewable resources whose value is reducible to how they meet human interests, it has been the purpose of this essay to argue, albeit incompletely--that, plus to sound the alarm so that we or our children *simply will not allow* this wrong to travel with us on our journey into the unknown. There is much to be learned and understood if we are to make our way morally through the cosmos. Paradoxically, perhaps, a first small step for morality and a giant leap for our morally enlightened treatment of those animals we may one day meet in space is that we stop eating pigs (and other farm animals) here on earth.¹⁴

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NOTES

1. For a detailed discussion of the moral issues involved in the debate concerning the Treaty of the Sea, see Robert L. Simon, "Troubled Waters: Global Justice and Ocean Resources", in Tom Regan, ed. *Earthbound: New Introductory Essays in Environmental Ethics*. New York: Randon House, 1984.
2. See, for example, Lewis Reganstein. *America the Poisoned*. Washington: Acropolis Books, 1982, esp. Chapter 2.
3. Father Joseph Rickaby, S.J. *Moral Philosophy* (1901). Relevant portions are reprinted in Tom Regan and Peter Singer, eds. *Animals Rights and Human Obligations*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1976, pp. 179-180.
4. Voltaire, "Animals", in his *Philosophical Dictionary*. Relevant portions are reproduced in Regan and Singer, eds. *op. cit.* pp. 67-68.
5. See, in particular, Jim Mason and Peter Singer, *Animal Facto-*

- ries. New York: Crown Publishers, 1980.
6. See, in particular, R.G. Frey. *Interests and Rights: The Case Against Animals*, Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1982, esp. Chapters 7-10. For a short critique of some of Frey's views regarding desire, see my "Frey on Why Animals Cannot Have Simple Desires", *Mind* 91 (1982), pp. 277-280. I subject Frey's view about the concept of belief to sustained criticism in my *The Case for Animal Rights*. Berkeley: University of California, 1983, Chapter 2.
 7. One finds this argument in, for example, Frey, *op. cit.*, pp. 83-85.
 8. Both common sense and ordinary language are on the side of viewing pigs and many other animals as sophisticated mental creatures, and the implications of evolutionary theory are similarly supportive. For a fuller discussion of these points see my *The Case For Animal Rights*, Chapters 1 and 2.
 9. See, for example, Charles Darwin. *The Descent of Man*, Chapters 3 and 4. Relevant portions are reprinted in Regan and Singer, eds. *op. cit.*, pp. 72-81.
 10. See, for example, Immanuel Kant, *The Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*, trans. by H.J. Paton. New York: Harper and Row, 1963. The idea of inherent value is explored at greater length in my *The Case of Animal Rights*, Chapter 7.
 11. Richard Ryder was the first one to make this point forcefully, coining the word "speciesism" to name the moral prejudice with regard to animals that is analogous to more familiar prejudices such as racism and sexism. See his *Victims of Science: The Use of Animals in Research*, London: Davis-Poyntner, 1975.
 12. See, for example, Jan Narveson, "Animal Rights", *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 7 (1977), pp. 177 ff. Narveson's and similar views are discussed at length in my *The Case For Animal Rights*, Chapter 5.
 13. This claim is defended at length in my *The Case For Animal Rights*, especially Chapters 4-8.
 14. Comments by my colleague, W.R. Carter, helped make this a better paper than it otherwise would have been. I am pleased to acknowledge my debt to him, without thereby identifying him as the source of the views I express or the errors I commit.