

Stewardship

By Craig Paardekooper

Stewardship is the exercise of power or agency with regard for the welfare of those under one's power. It therefore requires the union of **power and love**.

Power exercised without regard for others is merely self-interested, and tends toward exploitation, abuse, and tyranny. Competence cannot compensate for lack of regard; indeed, competence makes the powerful more dangerous when divorced from concern for others.

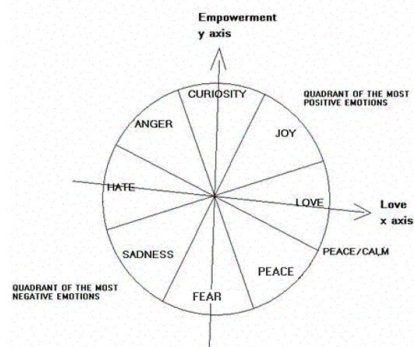
This is especially evident in governance. The capacity to love is often overlooked in favour of expertise or technical skill, yet competence without love easily degenerates into technocratic maltreatment, control, manipulation, deception, and contempt for those governed.

Emotion and Stewardship

Human emotion can be mapped along two bipolar, orthogonal dimensions: **agency** and **love**. The most positive emotional states arise from their conjunction. This indicates that human flourishing is associated with stewardship rather than domination.

Positive emotion arises from value alignment. The deepest positive affect accompanies agency exercised in love, suggesting where true values lie.

Love is regard for another independent of self-interest. It is the recognition that another life is an end in itself. Once this recognition occurs, concern is no longer confined to the self and becomes capable of extension beyond it.



See

[Unified Theory of Ethics](#)

[Emotions and Values](#)

[Love and Ego](#)

The Grounds of Stewardship

Intelligent Origin

If reality is the product of intelligent creation, then beings exist for reasons. Purpose exists independently of whether it is recognised—grounded in the mind of the Creator.

If creatures were created for purposes, then each possesses an objective good proper to its nature. Moral agents, capable of recognising this, are obligated to respect those goods. Recognition of purposeful origin therefore implies stewardship. See [Idea of Creation](#)

Natural Purpose

Purpose is perceptible in nature. Living beings exhibit:

- **Structural purpose** (organization of parts),
- **Homeostatic purpose** (maintenance against disorder),
- **Functional purpose** (goal-directed, error-correcting processes).

These purposes give each life a trajectory: development, maintenance, and adaptation. Because they are objective facts about living beings, they determine what benefits or harms a creature—how it ought to be treated. See [Goal Directedness](#)

Respect for natural purpose is the foundation of regard for others.

Pain as a Signal of Violated Purpose

In sentient creatures, violation of natural ends manifests as pain or emotional suffering. These are not arbitrary sensations but signals of frustrated function and meaning.

Pain perception itself depends on purposive, goal-directed systems. Emotional suffering arises when a creature's capacities are blocked or damaged.

If nature were purposeless, pain and suffering would be inexplicable. There would be no reason for systems that detect harm, because nothing would matter. The existence of pain therefore presupposes objective purpose.

Our capacity to perceive purpose shapes our moral behaviour toward other creatures.

The Essential Condition of Stewardship: Agency

Agency is the capacity to choose. Because our actions proceed from volition rather than compulsion, we are responsible for them. See [Life](#), [Transcendence](#), [Mind and Body](#), [Agency](#)

If we are free to act, we are not compelled to exploit, dominate, or abuse. Self-interest is not inevitable; it is chosen. We possess sufficient freedom from immediate biological necessity to consider the welfare of others.

Self-restraint—the ability to refrain from harm even when it is advantageous—is a core expression of agency and a necessary condition for stewardship.

Supporting Capacities

Rationality

Rationality demands consistency. If it is acceptable to treat animal life with disregard, then—absent a principled distinction—it is acceptable to treat human life likewise.

If we believe we ought to be treated in accordance with our nature, reason demands that the same respect be extended to other creatures capable of flourishing or suffering.

Symbolic Perception

Human action is never merely factual; it is meaningful. Humans possess symbolic perception—the capacity to see one thing as standing for something else.

A symbol generalises:

- A single animal can represent a class.
- “Dog” or “cow” stands for all members of that kind.

Symbols enable care or harm to be extended beyond immediate presence.

Sentient creatures are perceived not merely as organisms, but as symbols of life itself. We can see other creatures as symbols of ourselves – sharing common DNA, anatomy, functions, needs and sentience.

When Adam named each animal, he was doing more than cataloguing species. **A name is a symbol** representing a **class of beings**. A name is also a recognition of a creature’s essence, function or **identity**, and its place in creation. So symbolic perception is how we apprehend the objective purposes I described earlier.

The identity of a creature may be defined by its origin (accident, or creation), or by its destiny, e.g. function. How we define its identity will have a powerful effect on how we treat it.

Human Nature

If humans are conceived to be intrinsically selfish, violent, compulsive and irrational, then it is doubtful that we will consider our role to be one of stewardship. We might, however, consider ourselves to be beasts.

But if human nature includes capacities for love, restraint, responsibility, rationality, and symbolic understanding, then we stand out from the beasts as a distinct class of creature to which stewardship would appear a natural vocation.

Are Humans Predatory?

Teleologically considered, humans do not appear designed as predators.

Anatomy: Lack of predatory equipment

- No claws for killing

- No tearing canines comparable to carnivores
- Weak bite force relative to predators
- Jaw movement optimized for grinding, not shearing

Digestive profile

- Long intestines relative to body size (consistent with plant digestion)
- Limited capacity to handle raw meat safely
- High susceptibility to pathogens from flesh without cooking

Psychological absence of predatory drive

- Humans generally experience **revulsion**, not attraction, to killing animals directly
- Children do not spontaneously hunt
- Meat is culturally disguised, processed, ritualized

This strongly supports the claim that **predation is not instinctive**, but engineered around. Through ingenuity and agency humans can override this and adopt an omnivorous diet, e.g. meat is made edible by tenderising and cooking. Predation is possible through ingenuity, not necessity.

A wolf kills because it must.

A human kills because it chooses.

Because humans can survive without killing, can reflect on consequences, and can choose alternatives, moral responsibility is heightened rather than diminished.

This is what we would expect if humans were created for stewardship rather than predation.

Conclusion

Because humans possess agency, self-restraint, rationality, symbolic perception, and the capacity for love—and because all living creatures have objective purposes—humans are morally obligated to exercise power in ways that respect, protect, and promote life. This is stewardship.

Final note

This is not a manifesto; it is a **moral anthropology**. Its strength lies in showing that stewardship is not imposed from outside, but emerges naturally from *what humans are* when properly understood.