

KANT AND RESPECT FOR ANIMALS

Bioethics & Animals (Spring 2013)

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"THE BIG THREE"

ETHICAL APPROACHES

- ▶ Virtue ethics
 - What dispositions should I cultivate in order to be a virtuous person?
 - Example: Aristotle
- ▶ Deontology
 - Which action is justified based on our duties and obligations (that go beyond merely optimizing consequences)?
 - Example: Immanuel Kant
- ▶ Consequentialism
 - Which action produces the most good, where 'good' is understood in terms of favorable consequences?
 - Example: Jeremy Bentham

IMMANUEL KANT



- ▶ 1724–1804, East Prussia
- ▶ **Human reason** as source of knowledge, concepts, duty
- ▶ Wants to ground ethical duties in necessity
 - should not be grounded in contingencies of time, place, culture, experience, inclinations (desire, feeling)
- ▶ Focuses on motivation, rather than the quality of actions or consequences
 - Principles to guide the will
 - Some principles will be *absolute*

DUTY AND RESPECT FOR THE MORAL LAW

- ▶ An action must be done from duty in order to have any moral worth.
 - **Duty**: “necessity of an action done out of respect for the law” (Ak 4:400)
 - If I **respect** the law, then it must motivate me *regardless* of inclination, self-interest, or consequences
 - Practical “love resides in the will and not in the propensities of feeling, in principles of action and not in tender sympathy” (Ak 4:399, emphasis added)
 - Reason can command we have **practical love**, not affection or feeling

WHAT IS THE APPROPRIATE MOTIVATION?



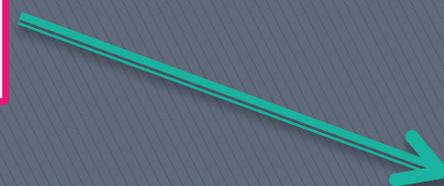
motivation: inclination (e.g., sympathy, happiness)



motivation: self-interest



motivation: because duty compels me



Action of moral worth
(intended if not achieved)

RESPECT-WORTHINESS

- ▶ Fundamental moral equality of human agents in virtue of shared **reason** and **autonomy**
 - Unconditionally and incomparably valuable, priceless
 - Autonomy grounds dignity and intrinsic worth
 - Equal participants in the kingdom of ends
- ▶ “rational beings are called persons inasmuch as their nature already marks them out as **ends in themselves**, i.e., as something which is not to be used merely as a means” (Ak 4:428, emphasis added)
- ▶ Cannot make an exception for myself
 - To do so undermines respect for others as equal members of the moral community

WHAT IS THE MORAL LAW?



- ▶ **Categorical imperative:** commands us to will certain things in virtue of our reason—regardless of what other ends, desires, or plans we have
 - **Universal law formulation:** “I should never act except in such a way that I can also will that my maxim should become a universal law” (Ak 4:402)
 - **Humanity formulation:** “Act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of another, always at the same time as an end and never simply as a means” (Ak 4:429)
 - **Autonomy formulation:** “all maxims are rejected which are not consistent with the will’s own legislation of universal law” (Ak 4:431)

DUTIES (EXAMPLES)

	to others	to self
perfect	not to lie	not to commit suicide out of misery
imperfect	beneficence	to cultivate one's talents and skills

KANT'S THOUGHTS ON NON-HUMANS

- ▶ World divided into **persons** and **things** (and that's it)
 - Persons: have reason, absolute worth
 - Things: without reason, only have relative worth
- ▶ Why is reason so important?
 - “consciousness of the grounds of our belief and actions—is the source of reason” (Korsgaard 103)
 - Makes autonomy and moral agency possible
- ▶ Only have direct duties to rational beings
 - Can have indirect duties to non-rational beings
 - Morally permissible to kill, hurt, or use animals, but it must be necessary (not achievable through other means) and humane

KANT'S THOUGHTS ON NON-HUMANS

- ▶ “If a man shoots his dog because the animal is no longer capable of service, he does not fail in his duty to the dog, for the dog cannot judge, but his act is inhuman and damages in himself that humanity which it is his duty to show towards mankind. If he is not to stifle his human feelings, he must practice kindness towards animals, for he who is cruel to animals becomes hard also in his dealings with men” (Kant, LE, 240).
- ▶ Some of our duties towards animals:
 - Not to treat them cruelly or inhumanely
 - To show gratitude for their services
 - Not to perform unnecessary scientific experiments on them

KORSGAARD: NEO-KANTIAN APPROACH

- ▶ On reciprocity:
 - If x owes something to y, then
 - y can claim that thing as a right from x, which requires that
 - x and y are under shared laws of owing and claiming (obligations and rights)

- ▶ Problem for animal ethics:
 - If non-humans cannot share normative laws, then they cannot make moral claims or be ends in themselves.
 - Korsgaard's query: Is there a way to understand the self-legislating of the moral law in such a way that it covers animals more directly?

KORSGAARD'S SOLUTION

- ▶ As legislator of the moral law, I confer value (within the dictates of universal reason).

- ▶ My end-setting (projects) and those of others are conferred value.
 - Remember: Respecting my ends and others' ends is morally required by the Categorical Imperative.
 - One common human end: Avoid pain and suffering.
 - Not merely because pain and suffering hurt autonomous agency.
 - We share this end with non-humans...What does that mean for our valuing and treatment of non-human interests?

KORSGAARD'S SOLUTION

- ▶ 'Obligation' on a Kantian account?
 - Korsgaard's preference: "the acknowledgement that the other has a claim under laws whose authority we recognize, because they spring from our own will" (109)
- ▶ Non-humans have similar interests and projects, so their interests can be respect-worthy in this way. (Weak argument)
- ▶ Our embodied, animal selves are valued insofar as that is the self with ends and interests. (Strong argument)
 - So non-humans can make claims under the moral law and thus be ends in themselves!
 - Supported by above definition of 'obligation'

KORSGAARD'S SOLUTION

- ▶ Non-humans as comparable to never competent moral patients
 - Rational beings are decisional proxies for their interests.

“We may interact with the other animals as long as we do so in ways to which we think it is plausible to think they would consent if they could—that is, in ways that are mutually beneficial and fair, and allow them to live something reasonably like their own sort of life” (110)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- ▶ What is compelling about taking a traditional Kantian approach to applied ethics? What is problematic?
- ▶ Does Korsgaard's argument veer too drastically from Kant's moral philosophy?
 - Are there gaps in her argument?
 - Do you think Kant would concede her points?
- ▶ In using the "decisional proxy" test, do you think we can cover most of our concerns re: the treatment and use of non-human animals?

QUESTIONS?

»» Comments?