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Mrs. X’s Kidnapping

Say you have been asked to make an ethical choice: either hang a fifty-five-year-old woman convicted of securities fraud or do nothing and your captor Mrs. X will kill a bear with razorblades to the stomach. You are forced to choose an option by Mrs. X. This paper will explore the ethical considerations of choosing either option. Is it right to torture an animal over an almost instant death of a human? Is it ever okay to value a non-human’s pain over a human’s pain? These are the types of questions to consider when investigating the morality of choosing either ethical path.

Emanuel Kant argues that animals are not persons because they are not rational or conscious beings capable of morality. However, humans should treat them well because it will develop good character and morals. Basically, Kant wants his readers to see that a human’s duties to treating animals well are indirectly duties to having better morals toward other humans. Kant is the philosopher who invented the process of identifying a maxim, asking what if everyone did that, and deciding it’s morality based on if everyone could do that. In this case, initially it seems like Kant would save the human being because he doesn’t think that animals are capable of morality. However, based on Kant’s belief that treating animals with dignity is a good example for treating humans well, he may think torturing a bear would be more immoral. He may think this because this horrific death of internal bleeding would lead to worse morals in a human than breaking someone’s neck in a hanging. Furthermore, using Kant’s process, if everyone commits securities fraud then our economy would collapse. Thus, this fifty-five-year-old woman is actively breaking society. A bear, however, can’t create a maxim that would break society. It could be argued that for said reasons, Kant would hang the woman and save the bear.

Peter Singer argues that an animal’s rights are important and, in fact, is the next main rights campaign for human society. He equates the civil rights movement or woman’s voting rights to the animal rights movement. Singer wants the reader to see that animals can feel pain just like humans can, alluding to Bentham’s views on animal cruelty (Bentham states that animals can feel dolors so we can’t be cruel to them). Singer also defines “speciesism” as a prejudice that favors one’s own species over another species. It seems clear that Singer would choose to hang the woman because it is more humane of a death than a death by razorblade ingestion. Singer would justify his decision by claiming the choosing of the option to feed a bear razor blades would be textbook “speciesism”.

Jeremy Bentham says, “The question is not, Can they reason? nor Can they *talk*? but, *Can they suffer*?” He makes the point that we should look at morality in terms of suffering or dolors rather than if a creature is high minded. So now the question becomes does human suffering matter more than animal suffering. In terms of this argument, assuming the woman’s neck breaks from the rope, there is extremely little suffering for her as opposed to the bear. Assuming the bear’s dolors compared to the woman’s dolors is a thousand to one respectively, if man’s dolors don’t matter a thousand times more than this bears than the bears dolors are more important. So, the right thing to do in Bentham’s eyes is to kill the woman.

Another thing to consider in this quandary is that one choice is an active option and one choice is a passive option. Negative responsibility states that you are guilty through inaction as well as action. But there are some that don’t believe in negative responsibility, meaning that if you are not preforming the action of feeding the bear razorblade steaks then you are not responsible for it. So, if you don’t believe in negative responsibility then the choice to do nothing (and save the woman) is an obvious choice.

It my opinion that the fifty-five-year-old woman should be hung and the bear spared. This is in accordance with my opinions on what each philosopher would do in this quandary because I was using arguments these philosophers made to advance this agenda.