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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. Kant, Singer, and Bentham have spent their lives looking at ethical problems. To research the right thing to do, this paper will interpret their ideas.

Emanuel Kant, a man who invented his own form of ethics (Kantianism), argues that animals are not persons because they are not rational or conscious beings capable of morality. However, humans should treat animals well because it develops good character and strong morals. Basically, Kant wants his readers to see that a human’s duties to treating animals in a respectful manner are indirectly responsible for having better morals in general. Meaning that you will treat humans better if you treat animals better. Kant is the philosopher who invented this process: identify a maxim, then ask what if everyone did that (or apply it to everyone), and then see if society would collapse. This is deciding a maxims morality based on if everyone could do that without collapsing society. In this case, it initially seems like Kant would want to 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, or lead to worse morals in a human. He may think this because a horrific death of internal bleeding is much worse than breaking someone’s neck in a hanging, meaning it leads to worse morals. Furthermore, using Kant’s own process: if everyone commits securities fraud like this woman does, then our economy and therefore society, would collapse. Thus, this fifty-five-year-old woman is actively breaking society and is a moral defector. A bear is not capable of being a defector. A bear can’t create a maxim that would break society. For these reasons, I think Kant would hang the woman and save the bear because it would lead to better morals in the person making the choice to act or not.

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.