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HPS/Pl 183: Bioethics

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Short Assignment 4

*Q: In 500-750 words:* *Explain the ways in which DeGrazia and Beauchamp’s “Principles of animal research ethics” resemble and differ from Kant’s and Singer’s views on animals.*

*R:* In “Principles of animal research ethics”, DeGrazia and Beauchamp propose a set of rules designed to protect and emphasize the moral treatment of animals in research. In this short assignment I will show that this work differs significantly from Kant’s and Singer’s previous work on animals in both scope and message, while also demonstrating the similarities between each work.

To begin with, it should be noted that all three perspectives are similar in that they all grant certain moral protections to animals. While Kant holds that animals are not rational begins to be treated as moral ends in themselves, he still grants the protections from cruel behavior, as he believes cruelty to animals is desensitizing and leads to cruelty toward humans. Singer grants a much higher level of protection to animals, arguing *contra* Kant that animals are beings capable of feeling pain who should be treated as moral ends in their own respects. DeGrazia and Beauchamp’s principles can be considered guidelines on how to treat animals without cruelty, which would be necessitated by both of Kant’s and Singer’s perspectives. This establishes a basis of agreement between all three perspectives, in that all attempt to establish a basis for moral duties towards animals.

However, DeGrazia and Beauchamp’s work differs significantly from that of Kant and Singer in scope. Kant and Singer both comment on the general treatment of animals across society. For example, Kant repeatedly references the treatment of dogs as pets as well as butchers, and Singer discusses the practice of eating meat at length alongside the general treatment of animals in philosophy. On the other hand, DeGrazia and Beauchamp’s work very specifically targets animal research. Whereas Kant and Singer both attempt to establish normative bases for the treatment of animals across society, DeGrazia and Beauchamp begin from the idea that animal harm is morally wrong and attempt to prescribe research principles to reduce it. In this way, their work is much more specific and differs in its mission from that of Kant and Singer.

In commenting on animals, Kant does briefly make mention of animal research. In line with his idea that animals are irrational and should not be considered moral ends in themselves, Kant holds that cruelty in animal research is blanketly made morally permissible because its intentions are praiseworthy. At first glance this blanket permissibility seems to be at odds with the work of DeGrazia and Beauchamp, however I will argue there are similarities here. While Kant does not expand on what is meant by “intentions”, I would argue that for research to truly have praiseworthy intentions, it must promise a net benefit to humanity – bring about this benefit being the praiseworthy intention. This intention-based exemption for cruelty implies only those cruel actions which are necessary to bring about the benefit are excused, since any additional cruelty which is not necessary will not be done with the same intention. So Kant therefore covers DeGrazia and Beauchamp’s principles of expected net benefit and of no unnecessary harm, showing greater similarity between their work than may be expected. However, the remaining principles are not reflected in Kant, so that for Kant, harms to not need to be proportional to their expected value, they need not be the only alternative, we need not provide animals with their basic needs, and there is no established upper limit to harm. DeGrazia and Beauchamp’s emphasis of these areas provide a significant difference between their work and Kant’s.

In “All Animals are Equal”, Singer presents his principle of equality in consideration, arguing that not providing equal consideration to the needs of animals represents a form of discrimination he names “speciesism”. Equality of consideration means that rather than granting all sentient life equal rights, the rights of all sentient life should be considered equally. A natural question to therefore ask is whether the principles proposed by DeGrazia and Beauchamp are speciesist, or if they truly constitute equal consideration of the rights of animals. The answer is pretty clear – while a significant step-up from previous protections granted to animals in research contexts, the principles still demonstrate speciesism. There is a clear way to see this – replace mentions of animals in their principles with mentions of humans. The principles will immediately seem far too weak. In their discussion of harm minimization and upper limit to harm, DeGrazia and Beauchamp provide a route through which to euthanize animals in research, an actions which we would never find to be permissible for the treatment of humans in research. This shows a clear inequality of consideration for human and animal rights to life, demonstrating speciesism.

We can therefore rank each of the authors’ perspectives in order of strength of protection, while acknowledging that all three are similar in that they offer some protection, from low to high as Kant, DeGrazia and Beauchamp, and Singer. The protections offered in each may be considered a subset of the protections offered in the preceding work, with each adding additional protections over the previous work.