

One Page Paper

Part 1

?? not sure. Reconstruct one of the readings we have already done?

Argument Reconstruction

Assumption 1: Animals are not rational agents.

Assumption 2: Contractualist moral theory is the best moral theory for a society.

- I. If an entity is a rational agent then it possesses moral standing.
- II. Animals are not rational agents, and most humans are rational agents.
- III. The humans who are rational agents provide moral standing to humans that are not rational agents (ie senile old humans or infants) as they have emotional attachment to them and through contractualist moral theory it is in the benefit for all agents to provide the non-rational agent humans moral standing.
- IV. Therefore, no animals possess moral standing, and all humans do possess moral standing.

Definition: Rational agents are defined by the author as creatures capable of changing their behavior to be in compliance with some set of universal rules (for example, "don't steal"). They should be able to understand the benefits and consequences of adopting certain rules in their community as a whole.

Definition: Contractualist moral theory states that morals are not naturally occurring concepts, instead they are brought into existence through contracts rational beings make with each other that benefit all parties involved.

Argument Analysis + Thesis

Carruther relies on two important assumptions to build his argument. The first being that animals are not rational agents and the second being that contractualism is the best moral theory for a society. Then he states that rational agents are the only entities that can have moral standing through his contractualism assumption (premise, I). His other assumption about animals not being rational agents allows him to state that animals are not rational, therefore don't have moral standing, and that most humans are rational agents and therefore those humans have moral standing (premise, II). He then justifies that all humans, even the non-rational agents, have moral standing by arguing that infants and senile old people will be given rights by rational human beings due to their emotional attachment (premise, III). This leads to the conclusion that

no animals possess moral standing, and all humans do possess moral standing (conclusion, IV).

I believe that there are a few problems with Carruther's argument, but my main objections lie with the assumption (assumption 2) Carruther makes about contractualism being the best moral theory, or at least in his interpretation of contractualism. Carruther describes contractualism in two distinct ways.

- (a) The first description of contractualism is a set of moral rules (or "agreements") that would be agreed upon by all rational beings from behind a veil of ignorance.
- (b) The second description is a set of moral rules that no rational being rejects, where every rational being has full access to their circumstances and a power to veto rules that are unfair to them.

Carruther also stresses the point that since contractualism gives rise to morality it cannot be that the rational agents had a set of morals beforehand. He uses both definitions of contractualism in his later points to justify that his arguments are not valid due to one particular form of contractualism.

Argument objection

My first issue with Carruther's argument is that the way he defines contractualism is circular. He states in his argument that there is no inherent sense of morality in rational beings before the idea of contractualism is put in place. This implies that there is no sense of "right" or "wrong" in rational beings before contractualism. However, the grounds on which a rule is rejected in Carruther's definitions require the rational beings to have a previous sense of morality. For example, in description (b), to reject a rule would require a rational being having a previous sense of fair and unfair - which directly contradicts the fact that in this definition rational beings do not have any sense of morality from before.

Another issue I have with contractualism is that it does not account for morality universally, which is not how Carruther interprets it, applying the moral rules from contractualism universally. I do not think that this should be the case, as contractualism is based upon several rational entities making promises or "contracts" with each other, and therefore the extent of the moral rules should be limited to only apply to those involved in creating the moral contracts. Therefore it is not reasonable to say that the moral rules humans create through agreements with each other extend to animals as well.

Objection

An objection to my argument might go as follows:

Morality only applies to rational agents since the rational agents are the only ones that can perceive and act on morality. Therefore, it should be irrelevant whether or not contractualism accounts for morality universally, as it only matters for how it governs the mannerisms of the rational agents.

Response

I would agree with the objection to the extent that morality is only needed for rational agents, as they are the only ones that will act upon those moral rules. However, the objection misinterprets what is meant by contractualism not accounting for morality universally. By morality accounting universally I mean that there are moral rules created for rational agents that account for everything, not just interactions with other rational agents. Therefore, it matters that there should be separate moral rules to interact with non-rational agents governed by some other guidelines.

main problems:

1. Contractualism is unrealistic
2. Contractualism is circular
3. Does not account for morality in its entirety
4. Many people's lesser complaints do not outweigh one person's larger complaint. Does not aggregate the lesser needs of many people, treats everyone's lives strictly independently. (trolley problem - has no soln in some defns of contractualism, (b)?). No sense of the greater good.
5. Blurs the line with racism/sexism?
6. Emotional attachment to old people will necessarily imply a set of moral rules that exist before contractualism.
7. Implies the more you engage with society the more morals you have. Therefore hermits have no morals?

OTHER NOTES.

1. Evaluate Argument
 - a. Explain what logical structure it has and why it is valid
2. Present Thesis and Defend it
 - a. I think that premise X of this argument is false
 - b. To defend, give reasons why the thesis is true.
3. Provide best objection against argument
4. Respond to objection

Obj - its a moral theory doesn't need to be realistic

Response - what is the point of the theory when it is not applicable to people's lives/

I believe that there is a flaw in Carruther's argument, which lies in his interpretation of contractualist moral theory. I believe his interpretation of the theory incorrectly assumes that the moral rules created by contractualism extend universally, which I claim is not true.

The first problem I have with Carruther's argument is that he interprets contractualism as a theory that accounts for morality in its entirety. I do not think that this should be the case, as contractualism is based upon several rational entities making promises or "contracts" with each other, and therefore the extent of the moral rules should be limited to only apply to those involved in creating the moral contracts. It is not justified to extend the reach of a "contract" made between two rational agents to everything else. Therefore it is not reasonable to say that the moral rules humans create through agreements with each other extend to animals as well.

I believe that there is a flaw in the Carruther's argument which lies in the fact that he assumes that contractualist moral theory is the best moral theory for a society. Furthermore, even if contractualist moral theory is the best moral theory for a society, I believe his interpretation of the theory in the context of animals' moral standing is incorrect.

The first problem I have with Carruther's argument is that he interprets contractualism as a theory that accounts for morality in its entirety. I do not think that this should be the case, as contractualism is based upon several rational entities making promises or "contracts" with each other, and therefore the extent of this moral theory should be limited to the morality of dealing with those other rational entities, and not extend to everything else like Carruther does in his argument. The fact that a "contract" is being made between two rational entities, leading to their moral standing does not imply that everything not involved with that "contract" automatically does not have a moral standing, instead it simply means that the moral standing of the rational entities is decided and the other entities are left outside the extent of the moral rules agreed upon.

If we can agree that Carruther's interpretation of contractualism is wrong, then animals are left outside of the moral rules agreed upon by humans. Therefore, we cannot simply assume that animals have no moral standing

1. Not realistic
2. Selfishness inherent to humans means that there are pre-existing values and morals
3. Flaw in argument where humans are not attached to other beings apart from infants and senile old people.
4. Emotional attachment to old people will necessarily imply a set of moral rules that exist before contractualism.

Contractualism is not an ideal

Innate selfish desire.

Innate genetic desire to live and survive.

There are innate moral values built into us.

Flaw with giving moral standing to infants and senile old people - same can be then said about giving moral standings to animals that humans have come to value highly (ie cows in hinduism).

There is also an issue with the fact that principle in which the social contract theory is based is highly abstract and cannot bind us morally, or guide our practical reasoning. Why does it bind you if you can get away with it not binding you?

Veto idea - nothing is going to get agreed upon.

Hermits.

Chimpanzees.

Implies the more you engage with society the more morals you have. Therefore hermits have no morals?