

ETHICAL FRAMEWORKS: DEONTOLOGY

MORAL STATUS

- What is the reason we treat some creatures differently with respect to what is morally required/permissible than others?
- What makes it the case that one being is owed respect or obligation while another is not?

UTILITARIANISM ON MORAL STATUS

*The question is not, Can they reason? nor Can they talk?
But, Can they suffer? (Bentham, Introduction to the
Principles of Morals & Legislation, ch. 17)*

- All and only sentient beings have moral status, because only beings capable of feeling pleasure or pain can be wronged

DEONTOLOGY

- The word "deontology" derives from the Greek words for "duty" (deon) and "science" (logos)
- The rightness/wrongness of an action depends on whether the action is in accordance with moral principles or laws

DEONTOLOGY VS. UTILITARIANISM

- Utilitarianism assesses the rightness of an act in terms of how good (in the case of hedonism: pleasurable) the consequences are
- A deontological view assesses the moral goodness of an action in terms of whether it is *right* – whether it accords with moral principles or laws

KANT'S ANTI-CONSEQUENTIALIST DEONTOLOGY

- What is of value is the capacity to set ends and to act in principled ways to achieve those ends
 - Acting from an awareness of laws or principles is acting for reasons
 - A being who bases their actions on reasons is a "rational" being

ACTION & IMPERATIVES

- Two kinds of laws or rules for action:

Hypothetical imperative

command to do something whose value is conditioned by its status as a means to some further end, which is also willed

Categorical imperative

command to do something whose value is unconditioned – i.e. whose value is an end in itself

THE CATEGORICAL IMPERATIVE

*Act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law
(Kant, Groundwork 4:421)*

ACTING AUTONOMOUSLY

Autonomy

the property of being self-governing, and hence of being able to engage in actions and patterns of evaluation that are under one's control

- Kant construes autonomous action as *principled* action and of principles as rules which all share the same characteristic – *universality*

THE FORMULA OF HUMANITY

So act that you use humanity, whether in your own person or that of another, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means (Kant, Groundwork 4:429)

- Using another "merely" as a means fails to respect their humanity (their status as rational persons, capable of setting their own ends)

KANTIAN DEONTOLOGY & MORAL STATUS

- Possession of moral status, for the kantian, depends on the capacity to act in ways that the agent is aware of as being right or wrong—i.e. acting in ways that depend on moral laws or principles

KANT ON MORAL STATUS

man and generally any rational being exists as an end in himself, not merely as a means to be arbitrarily used by this or that will, and in all his actions, whether they concern himself or other rational beings, must be always regarded at the same time as an end [and not merely as a means].
(Kant, p. 4)

- Only rational beings have moral status because only rational beings are intrinsically valuable

KANT ON DUTIES TO ANIMALS

Our duties towards animals are merely indirect duties towards humanity...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 dealing with men.

ARE ANIMALS THINGS?

Those beings whose existence rests not on our will but on nature, if they are non-rational beings, have still only a relative worth, as means, and are therefore called things, while rational beings, on the contrary, are called persons, because their nature already distinguishes them as ends in themselves, i.e. as something that may not be used merely as a means, hence to this extent limits all arbitrariness (and is an object of respect). (Kant, Groundwork 4:428)

- Non-rational beings are "things" – they have merely relative value as means
- We should treat animals well only because cruelty towards animals tends to translate into cruelty towards humans

KORSGAARD'S DEFENSE OF KANT

THE RECIPROCITY ARGUMENT

1. Rights and obligations are reciprocally related
2. Non-rational animals cannot be obligated to do anything
3. \therefore Non-rational animals cannot have rights
4. If non-rational animals cannot have rights, then they cannot be wronged
5. \therefore There is nothing we morally owe to non-rational animals, i.e. there are no "direct" moral requirements or principles governing their treatment

AGAINST THE RECIPROCITY ARGUMENT

1. Why think that one may only enjoy a right if one can also be the subject of an obligation?
 - problem of marginal cases
2. Perhaps animals have rights, which generate obligations for us, if they fall under laws whose authority we endorse

THE VALUE OF ANIMAL NATURE

As animals, we are beings for whom things can be good or bad: that is just a natural fact. When we demand to be treated as ends in ourselves, we confer normative significance on that fact. We legislate that the things that are good or bad for beings for whom things can be good or bad-that is, for animals-should be treated as good or bad objectively and normatively. In other words, we legislate that animals are to be treated as ends in themselves. And that is why we have duties to the other animals.

