

# **WEEK 7 ETHICAL FRAMEWORKS (II): DEONTOLOGY**

# REVIEW

# MORAL STATUS

## Moral Status:

deserving of, or otherwise qualifying for, moral consideration

- What is the reason we treat some creatures differently than others with respect to what is morally required/permissible to do to them?
- What makes it the case that one kind 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 have *interests* and thus can be wronged

# DEONTOLOGY

# DEONTOLOGY & LAWS

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

# DEONTOLOGY VS. CONSEQUENTIALISM

- Consequentialism assesses the rightness of an act in terms of how good (in the case of utilitarianism: 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

# DEONTOLOGY APPLIED: ANIMAL RIGHTS



# ANIMALS & INDIRECT DUTY VIEWS

*some people believe that we have no duties directly to animals—that we owe nothing to them—that we can do nothing that wrongs them. Rather, we can do wrong acts that involve animals, and so we have duties regarding them, though none to them. Such views may be called indirect duty views. (Regan, 32)*

## The indirect duty view:

We should treat animals well only because cruelty towards animals tends to translate into cruelty towards humans

# 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?

*[Non-rational beings] have...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)*

- According to Kant's view non-rational beings are “things” – they have merely relative value as means

# THE PROBLEM WITH INDIRECT DUTY VIEWS

- Views that allow only indirect duties to animals locate moral status in the wrong place
  - We can see the problem of locating moral status by looking at “marginal cases”

# AGAINST UTILITARIANISM

- Utilitarianism's emphasis on aggregation fails to respect the rights of those individuals who have moral status

*Here is an analogy to help make the philosophical point clearer: a cup contains different liquids—sometimes sweet, sometimes bitter, sometimes a mix of the two. What has value are the liquids: the sweeter the better, the bitter the worse. The cup—the container—has no value. It's what goes into it, not what they go into, that has value. For the utilitarian, you and I are like the cup; we have no value as individuals and thus no equal value. What has value is what goes into us, what we serve as receptacles for; our feelings of satisfaction have positive value, our feelings of frustration have negative value. (Regan, 35)*

# THE RIGHTS VIEW

*you and I, for example, do have value as individuals—what we'll call inherent value ... My value as an individual is independent of my usefulness to you. Yours is not dependent on your usefulness to me. For either of us to treat the other in ways that fail to show respect for the other's independent value is to act immorally—is to violate the individual's rights. (Regan, 36)*

## HAVING RIGHTS

- What does it take to have value as an individual—to have rights?
  - Inherent value belongs equally to any who are the “experiencing subjects of a life” (Regan, 37)
  - At least some animals are such experiencing subjects, so at least some animals have rights—they cannot be used merely as means to another’s ends

# ANIMAL RIGHTS

*The fundamental wrong is the system that allows us to view animals as our resources, here for us—to be eaten, or surgically manipulated, or put in our cross hairs for sport or money. (Regan, 31)*



# AN OBJECTION

- Problem: It is difficult to understand what inherent value is
  - The problem with inherent value isn't that it is mysterious, but rather that Regan hasn't provided a satisfactory explanation of *why* animals have inherent value
  - The fact that our knowledge of which beings have inherent value is limited doesn't mean that we shouldn't be cautious in the manner in which we make life or death decisions regarding their treatment

