

PHILOSOPHY 105

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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 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 (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 (the will) to act according to (i.e. with awareness of) laws or principles
 - Acting according to laws or principles is acting *consistently*
 - A being who acts in such ways 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)*

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.

- 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

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)

WILSON'S DEFENSE OF KANT

- Animals are "things" only in the sense that they are incapable of setting ends for themselves
- Animals are still living organisms, acting for purposes set for them by nature

