

DUTIES TOWARDS NON-RATIONAL ANIMALS: A KANTIAN UNDERSTANDING

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ABSTRACT

The paper makes an effort to show whether Kant's ethics is appropriate to deal with our moral obligations towards non-rational animals. Ethical view of Kant is based on the dignity of humanity as its sole fundamental value. Rational beings are intrinsically valuable because they are endowed with rationality, freedom and have the capacity to set their own ends. With regards to non-rational animals we have an only indirect duty. For him humans have no direct duties with regards to non-rational beings because they lack both rationality and autonomy. Kant rejection of direct duty to non-rational beings is the reason why many environmental ethicist and animals rights do not favor his approach. They considered Kant version of indirect duty theory is based on human-centered. However, some of the Kantian has tried to replace Kant's indirect duty theory to direct duties by using Kant theory. They offer a strong argument to replace the indirect duty theory of Kant but their interpretations do not fit well with Kant's view. Therefore, in this paper, despite the problems with indirect duty theory, I will try to show how Kant's concept of duties regarding non-rational animals represents much more sophisticated than the Kantian had maintained.

KEYWORDS: *Kant, Direct Duties, Autonomy, Indirect Duties, Non-Rational Animals*

INTRODUCTION

In environmental ethics, the concept of intrinsic value means something that is valuable for its own sake. Which means something is valuable for its own sake, then it is said to be intrinsically valuable but if something is valuable for the sake of something else, it can be stated as instrumentally valuable. For instance being polite is types of intrinsic value as it has inherent value in itself but my being polite towards non-rational animals turn out to be a kind of instrumental value because my politeness is extended to non-rational animals. One of the most central things that environmental ethicists at current are involved in is to find out a kind of intrinsic value in non-human creatures. Some ethicists claim that looking for intrinsic value in non-rational animals and the natural world is one of the most fundamental of environmental ethics.

For Kant only human beings are intrinsically valuable that they cannot be replaced by something else or a being with dignity is something that cannot be legitimately sacrificed for. In the formula of humanity Kant claims that those who have rational nature should not be treated for some other ends but always as an ends themselves. With regards to non-rational animals we have an only indirect duty, for Kant we have no direct duties with regard to non-rational animals and duties towards them are actually duties to humans. Kant rejection of direct moral consideration to non-humans is the reason why the environmental ethicists and animal rights have criticized Kant. They considered Kant account of indirect duty theory is based on human-centered. This paper will consider both strengths and weakness of Kant's moral philosophy in dealing with non-rational animals and try to show how Kant's concept of duties regarding non-rational animals represents

much more sophisticated than the Kantian had maintained. One important point of Kant indirect duties towards non-rational animals is that we can use non-rational beings as means to our ends, still we must avoid being cruel to them or minimize their suffering.

KANT'S ACCOUNT OF THE VALUE OF RATIONAL BEINGS AND NON-RATIONAL ANIMALS

Kant claims that human beings by virtue of their capacity to reason about and decide what to do, have an incomparable worth and dignity. They choose the subjective principles upon which they act and because of this, they are distinguished from animals that are moved to act by gravity or by their own instincts: "Everything in nature works in accordance with laws. Only a rational being has the capacity to act in accordance with the representation of laws, that is, in accordance with principles or has a will."¹ Kant's ethics is based on the dignity of humanity as its sole fundamental value. Rational beings are intrinsically valuable because they are endowed with rationality, freedom and have the capacity to set their own ends. In formula of humanity Kant stated that as a rational, "*exists as an end in itself, not merely as a means to be used by this or that will at its own discretion; instead he must in all his actions, whether directed to himself or also to other rational beings, always be regarded at the same time as an end.*"² This formula of Kant makes clear the idea of intrinsic value that ascribes to human beings that it draws the distinction between 'person' and 'things'.

The things have value only as a means to satisfy human end and it is the human ends that give them value. Thus if you want to be a good card player, you need a book of card instruction that has value for you, other than that the book has no value. These kinds of value consist of the market price or fancy price. Kant states that in the Kingdom of the end we should respect the dignity of every other member as an end in itself. Every rational being as will be giving universal law through its maxims and no one will treat anyone merely as a means. Therefore, the will of every rational being is to be regarded as self-legislative and hence it is autonomous. So, they cannot be treated as means only but also as an end in itself. This is the reason Kant claims that, "which constitutes the condition under which alone something can be an end in itself has not merely a relative worth, that is, a price, but an inner worth, that is, *dignity*."³ According to Kant only human beings are intrinsically valuable that they cannot be replaced by something else or a being with dignity is something that cannot be legitimately sacrificed for. Kant says that, "in the system of nature, a human being (*homo phaenomenon, animal rationale*) is a being of slight importance and shares with the rest of the animals, as offspring of the earth, an ordinary value (*pretium vulgare*)."⁴ Therefore, for Kant regards only human beings as unconditional value and considered as ends in themselves. This is the reason why some of the environmental ethicists considered this position as 'rationcentrism'⁵.

With regard to animals Kant's claims that, "we have no immediate duties; our duties towards them are indirect duties to humanity. Since animals are an analogue of humanity, we observe duties to mankind when we observe them as analogues to this and thus cultivate our duties to humanity."⁶ Non-rational animals cannot, in Kant view, be the direct objects of moral obligation because non-humans cannot possess wills nor are they persons. Kant states that, "a human

¹ Immanuel Kant, *Practical Philosophy*, ed. Mary J. Gregor, USA: Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 66.

² Ibid 79.

³ Ibid 84.

⁴ Ibid 557.

⁵ See, for instance, Sandler (2007, p.95), Atman (2011, p.16)

⁶ Immanuel Kant, *Lectures on Ethics*, ed. Peter Heath and L. B. Schneewind, Trans. Peter Heath, USA: Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 212.

being can therefore have no duty to any beings other than human beings; and if he thinks he has such duties, it is because of an *amphiboly* in his *concepts of reflection*, and his supposed duty to other beings is only a duty to himself.”⁷For him, we have no direct moral duties to animals arguing that, “since all animals exist only as means, and not for their own sakes, in that they have no self-consciousness, whereas man is the end”; and saying that, “our duties towards them are indirect duties to humanity.”⁸ He uses the example of a man who has his dog shot when the animal is no longer required for service; this is not a violation of any duty to the dog, but his duty to cultivate “the kindly and humane qualities in himself, which he ought to exercise in virtue of his duties to mankind.”⁹

IMPLICATIONS OF KANT DUTIES REGARDING NON-RATIONAL ANIMALS

Environmental ethicist argues that attributing intrinsic value solely to human beings only because of its rationality as a distinct quality cannot be a satisfactory reason. They claim that only if the issue is having different quality, then, for them non-rational animals also have some distinctive features. Peter Singer one of the most influential philosophers in the field of environmental ethics to explore whether there is anything of intrinsic value beyond human beings. According to him, Kant gives more priority to the human being in terms of morality which in fact is problematic and so Peter Singer proposes a graduated view of moral standing that applies to both humans and animals based on cognitive abilities, since some animals have higher IQs than some humans. Singer argues that, “some cognitive abilities are required to be capable of forming and adhering to an agreement of this kind. If you are profoundly mentally retarded, you may not have those abilities... as with the Kantian argument, therefore, a contractarian account of morality is unable to justify granting all humans a moral status superior to that of any nonhuman animal, though it may justify granting some humans a moral status superior to that of some humans and of any nonhuman animal.”¹⁰

For Singer the capacity for suffering is the vital characteristic that gives a being the right to equal consideration. Thus, the pain of humans and animals should be concerned equally. On the other hand, Singer relates to how we know that animals feel pain. Singer offers two arguments: the first is that the central nervous systems of vertebrates are essentially alike to ours; the second is that sentience gives an animal an advantage in survival. That is why the sole attribution of sentience to humans is highly unlikely. Thus Singer claims that sentient animals can also be regarded as intrinsically valuable as well as rational human beings depending on his criterion, which is capable of feeling pleasure or pain, to be morally concerned.

Tom Regan also opines that animals bear moral rights. Even though Regan objected Kant’s theory that respect is due only to Human beings still, his philosophy aligns mostly within the tradition of Kant. Like Kant, he also believes in the blessedness of life, and recommends that, while acting towards others, we are to treat animals as ends-in-themselves, not merely as a means to an end. According to Regan, for Kant “it is the effects that our treating animals in certain ways has upon our character, and for Kant,... the effect our character has on how we treat human beings, that provide the grounds

⁷ Immanuel Kant, *Practical Philosophy*, ed. Mary J. Gregor, USA: Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 563.

⁸ Immanuel Kant, *Lectures on Ethics*, ed. Peter Heath and L. B. Schneewind, Trans. Peter Heath, USA: Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 564.

⁹ *Ibid* 212.

¹⁰ Peter Singer, “Speciesism and Moral Status”, *Metaphilosophy*, USA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, vol. 40, nos. 3-4, 2009, p. 574.

for morally approving or disapproving our treating animals in certain ways.”¹¹ Regan takes issue with Kant’s idea that, “individuals who have inherent value must never be treated merely as a means to securing the best aggregate consequences.”¹²

Regan extends Kant’s concept of only rational beings have intrinsic worth and replaces with a broader definition. Regan considers inherent value for both for rational beings as well as non-rational kingdom who lack the necessity condition for moral agency. For Regan these moral patients have the same equal right. Thus Regan seems to be arguing that although he rejects Kant’s limitation of moral standing to humans, the argument from the inherent value of an end to moral standing is valid. The difference lies in the extension of moral standing to nonhumans based on relevant likenesses. Those with moral standing should not be treated as mere means since they are entitled to respect that is, to be treated as ends in themselves even to the non-animate kingdom.

KANTIAN ACCOUNT OF DUTY TOWARDS NON-RATIONAL ANIMALS

Kantians have presented a new approach for moral status with regards to non-rational animals. They say that Kant ethics, if modified and developed in significant ways, can hold a more forceful for the moral concerns towards non-rational animals. Allen Wood claims that Kant is committed to logocentrism which leads to exploitation of non-rational animals. For Kant, humanity had an intrinsic value because they are endowed with rationalism and autonomy. Whereas for non-rational animals we have no direct duties, Kant says that our duties towards them are indirect duties to humanity. Allen Wood objects Kant’s indirect duty theory and argues that these need to be replaced. He claims that in Kant’s account we are permitted to treat animals solely as instrumental for human needs.

He attempts to reconcile Kant Logocentric crisis by offering an alternative that is Kantian in spirit but discards what Wood calls the *personification principle*: “This principle says that rational nature is respected only by respecting humanity *in someone’s person*, hence that every duty must be understood as a duty to a *person* or persons.”¹³ As long as personification principle is true we cannot accommodate direct duties to animals and argues that Kantians must reject the personification principle. Wood argues that, “logocentric ethics, which grounds all duties on the value of human or rational nature, should not be committed to the personification principle.”¹⁴ Wood claims that by denying personification principle he propose that apart from humanity there can something inherently good and Kant moral theory should be modified and extend moral concern for non-rational being: “we should also respect rational nature *in the abstract*, which entails respecting fragments of it or necessary conditions of it, even where these are not found in fully rational beings or persons.”¹⁵ Wood states that certain nonhuman entities also bear the right relation to rational nature and argues that we also ought to respect things that are not themselves rational. Wood says that non-rational entities do not themselves deserve direct moral consideration if we accept the personification principle, such as being respected as ends-in-themselves.

¹¹ Tom Regan, *The Case for Animal Rights*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004, p.179.

¹² *Ibid* 249.

¹³ Allen W. Wood, “Kant on Duties Regarding Non Rational Nature”, *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Supplementary Volumes Vol. 72, (189-228), 1988, p. 196.

¹⁴ *Ibid* 197.

¹⁵ *Ibid* 198.

According to Wood, nonhuman animals possess certain, “fragments” “necessary conditions” or “the infrastructure, so to speak, of rational nature.”¹⁶ Wood argument turns on the thought that while animals are not fully person still, many animals experience pleasure and pain, “To frustrate an animal’s desires or to cause it to pain maliciously or wantonly is to treat with the contempt that part of rational nature which animals share with human beings.”¹⁷ Wood argues that respect rational human persons require respecting the “natural teleology” that human beings share with non-rational animals which means we ought to respect them that resemble rational beings in the right, morally relevant way. Wood does not claim that non-rational animals are ends in themselves but we should also respect things that are also not rational being.

Christine Korsgaard also attempted to justify direct duties to non-human animals. She says that Kant formula of *end in itself* can be understood to include non-rational animals and claim that they deserved direct moral considerations based on the account of animal nature. For Kant, only humans are ends in themselves because they are endowed with autonomous and self-regulating. Korsgaard also states that, for Kant rationality, “is the capacity for normative self-government. Rationality makes us capable of assessing and judging the principles that govern our beliefs and actions, and of regulating our beliefs and actions in accordance with those judgments.”¹⁸ We have no obligations towards non-rational animals because they cannot enter into a moral relationship with humans. Therefore, for direct moral considerations the agents must have the ability to reason and have a legislative will.

According to Korsgaard, even if animals do not have a moral duty towards others, it does not mean that humans do not have any moral concern with regards to non-rational animals. Korsgaard states that those caveats for beings have humanity (the infant, the very old, the severely retarded and the incurably insane) are misguided. She explains that Kant’s conceptions of rationality are those being that are nearly rational are rational being: “some of them are at stages of their lives when reason is undeveloped, inert, or non-functional. These conditions, I believe, do not affect their standing as rational beings under the Kantian conception.”¹⁹ She claims that, “despite appearances, and despite what he himself thought, Kant’s arguments reveal the ground of our obligations to the other animals.”²⁰

For Korsgaard we have direct duties to non-rational animals in virtue of natural good. Animals have the ability to chase and experience what is naturally good or bad. This means they have the capacity to pursue their own ends. She is saying that, “an animal is an organic system to whom its own good matters, an organic system that welcomes, desires, enjoys, and pursues its good. We could even say that an animal is an organic system that matters to itself, for it pursues its own good for its own sake...When we say that something is naturally good for an animal, we mean that it is good from its point of view.”²¹ Therefore, both human and non-rational animal as natural beings has the capacity to satisfy their desires and also has the ability to avoid treats to their well-being.

Korsgaard even compares non-rational animals to what Kant calls *passive citizens*, “in his political philosophy, Kant explicitly recognized this by introducing a category of what he called “passive citizens” including, as he supposed,

¹⁶ Ibid 197, 198, 200.

¹⁷ Ibid 200.

¹⁸ Christine M. Korsgaard, “Fellow Creatures: Kantian Ethics and Our Duties to Animals.”The Tanner Lectures on Human Values 25, University of Michigan, (77-110), 2004, p.87

¹⁹ Ibid 82.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid 102-103

women, children, apprentices, and house servants whose rights are protected by the laws of the state even though they may not vote.”²² Korsgaard opines that non-rational animals are not self-legislating agents still, they are worthy of moral consideration by those who do. She explains that the non-rational animals have the capacity to maintain themselves in such a way that things can be good or bad with regard to their own teleological development, “in taking ourselves to be ends-in-ourselves we *legislate* that the natural good of a creature who matters to itself is the source of normative claims. Animal nature is an end-in-itself, because our own legislation makes it so. And that is why we have duties to the other animals.”²³ Therefore, for Korsgaard the only difference between human and non-rational animals is that, human has the ability to reason to reflect on those goods and ends whereas non-rational animals are incentives, their aim is to satisfy their desire and they try to avoid the things that are undesirable.

ADDRESSING PROBLEMS WITH KANTIAN DUTIES TOWARDS NON-RATIONAL ANIMALS

The extension versions of Kant duties with regards to non-rational animals by Wood and Korsgaard is inspired by the idea of environmental ethicists who alleged that all individual living animals have intrinsic moral worth as they are free existence of their own. As for Wood we ought to consider moral concern to non-rational if they bear the right relations to rational nature- that is we ought to respect non-rational animals that display fragment or preconditions of rationality. Wood attempt to revise Kant, reject something that is one of the central to the moral theory of Kant. In Kant ethics, the formula of end in itself states that a being without reason, have only relative worth. For Kant, since animals lack the capability to reason they are not autonomous. The animals are only as a means to satisfy human ends. Being able to act in accordance with the principle is what separate human beings from non-rational animals. As a result I suggest that Wood expansion the scope of moral considerations for non-rational beings is a failure. Wood approach to extend Kant indirect duty to direct duty is a failure because even if they display fragments of rationality, they lack both rationality and autonomy.

On the other hand, Korsgaard says that non-rational animals have their own goods that matter to them. She explains that non-rational animals have the capacity to experience and also has the ability to pursue their own good. Korsgaard offers an account of animal nature share by both human and non-rational animals. She claims that since humans value their animal nature as an end in itself. Animals also have an animal nature, so they should be valuable. The problem with Korsgaard extensions is that it does not fit at all with Kant’s moral theory. In Kant ethics, the Formula of humanity says that one ought to respect the humanity of an individual as an end-in-itself. Kant says that animal is not rational so they cannot be place us under a moral obligation, however, human beings are kind of entity in which animals nature is attached to rational nature, hence, we have direct moral duties to rational beings.

J. Skidmore states that we have no direct duties towards animals because for Kant they are not considered as rational ends. Skidmore states that, “there are rational beings, or persons, who have an unconditional worth which he calls dignity, and as such they must be treated as ends in themselves... there are all other beings, non-rational beings who have only conditional worth and thus take on the moral status of things that may be treated merely as means. This suggests that Kant’s later conclusion that there are no direct duties to animals can be seen as a simple and direct application of the formula of humanity and the reasoning that leads up to it.”²⁴ For Skidmore, only rational agents are endowed with

²² Ibid 96.

²³ Ibid 106.

²⁴ James Skidmore, “Duties to Animals: The Failure of Kant’s Moral Theory,” *The Journal of value inquiry* 35, Kluwer Academic Publishers, Printed in the Netherlands,(541-559), 2001, p.543.

autonomous and autonomous, and animals lack both, so there is no reason in Kant's theory to claim that animals are own direct moral consideration. Wood's and Korsgaard's are right but only half right. Both of them are right to observe that non-rational nature is like us, but the infrastructure or conditions of reasoning are as a means to the only things that is end in itself: our humanity. Kant readily admits that reason is not the only ability possessed by human beings. We also have the ability to desire. Kant considered humans as a sentient creature as well as rational ones. However for Kant rationality is what makes human beings capable to act autonomously, and makes self-conscious not to be driven by desire. This ability makes us distinct and sets humans apart from non-rational nature. Yet because non-rational animals whose actions are determined entirely by desire and inclinations, they are not autonomous. The ability to act for the sake of duty is absent in non-rational beings hence, there is no morally relevant value. The only obligations of human beings towards non-rational animals are indirect duties.

KANT'S ACCOUNT OF CRUELTY AND THE TREATMENT OF NON-RATIONAL ANIMALS

Kant indirect duty theory towards non-rational beings is the reason for most environmental ethicists and animal rights considered his theory not right in dealing with non-rational nature. Despite the criticism face by indirect duty theory, some have compelled to maintain the indirect duty doctrine and they attempt to present new revised versions of Kantian account for the moral consideration of non-rational nature. O'Neil asserts that Kant's indirect duty theory sanctions a concern for the benefit of non-rational beings. Kant's position also leads to a wider view of the object of moral concern. O'Neil says that although Kant, "position may be speciesist up to a point: it requires action that takes account of the difference of species. It does not establish that non-rational beings of any species have rights, or that rational beings have direct duties to them. But Kant's position is not a straight and simple form of human chauvinism."²⁵

Appealing to Kant's indirect duty theory, O'Neill says that non-rational natures are not mere things for use. Kant's indirect theory presents a good reason for the preservation of the natural world, including individual animals and asserts that humans have a good reason, "to establish and sustain productive ways of life, clean waters, fertile soils, non-polluting technologies and stable habitats for human and nonhuman animals, as well as preserving biodiversity."²⁶ A healthy environment is required for human beings to satisfy their direct and indirect duties. Hence, insofar as human beings have a duty to promote the happiness of others, they should protect and conserve the environment for their survival. O'Neill accounts of the indirect-duty theory are different from other Kantian, who says that since non-rational natures have an intrinsic value they should be protected. However, unlike others she argues that, although rationality that distinguishes humans from non-rational nature, still she says that we should tread them good because we depend on nature for our good health. We are permitted to using nature, however we are restricted if our actions towards them affect on the human population. O'Neill account of indirect duty theory is laudable but unfortunately has not been extensively developed. She could not present a complete justification of how our obligation for non-rational nature leads to self-perfection.

Kant rejection of direct duty to non-rational animals might seem incompatible with justifying moral concerns to non-rational animals but after closely examining Kant's account of duties regarding non-rational beings, Kant's concept of duties regarding animals represents much more sophisticated than the Kantian maintains. It is important to note that for

²⁵ Onora O'Neill, "Necessary Anthropocentrism and Contingent Speciesism," *Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume* 72, no. (189-228), 1988, p. 227.

²⁶ Ibid 226

Kant, “human being is authorized to kill animals quickly (without pain) and to put them to work that does not strain them beyond their capacities (such work as he himself must submit to.”²⁷ Beside that Kant also opines that, “agonizing physical experiments for the sake of mere speculation, when the end could also be achieved without these, are to be abhorred. Even gratitude for the long service of an old horse or dog (just as if they were members of the household)”²⁸ Furthermore, in lectures on ethics Kant also states that, causing unnecessary harm to animals or treating them without love in general is ‘demeaning to ourselves’. Kant’s account of such actions as ‘demeaning to ourselves’ is instructive. The duties Kant mentions here are not just duties to be kind or avoid cruelty rather; there is something morally wrong with such actions themselves. Kant thinks that these moral duties are not owed to the other animals, but rather to ourselves because treating animals without love is ‘demeaning to ourselves’.

CONCLUSIONS

Kant denial of direct moral consideration to non-rational animals may be unacceptable with justifying moral consideration to non-rational animals. Still, Kant indirect duty matter because there is something morally not right of using an animal that involves subjecting or discarding that animal to make them suffer or pain otherwise, it would make little sense for Kant to claims that humans have a duty not to be cruel to animals. Kant gives due to the less popular species also. He says that we cannot think of being cruelty to a wolf. Leibniz put it back a worm on a leaf, after he was done observing it. Kant’s ground for our duties concerning animals also suggests that cruelty to animals betrays the absence of a moral quality one ought to have. It seems in Kant account the cruel treatment of animals and wanton destruction of flora is inherently wrong. We have duties toward animals and inanimate nature and these duties are the direct duty to oneself’. We can close this paper by saying that Kant’s indirect duty theory restricts our actions in ways that are consistent for the protection and preservation of non-rational animals.

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