Kant has had little impact on the field of environmental ethics. When his work is not simply ignored, it is often dismissed as a paradigm of morally corrupt anthropocentrism. Like many other Western philosophical and religious traditions, Kant places human beings at the center of the moral universe and does not directly consider the well-being of plants, animals, and ecosystems. Instead, they are only indirectly morally relevant, to the extent that they advance rational beings’ capacity to set and pursue ends; nonrational things can be used merely as means for the satisfaction of human needs. Because of this, many philosophers – Holmes Rolston III, J. Baird Callicott, Peter Singer, and others – conclude that Kant’s intellectual legacy is partly responsible for the environmental crises that we now face.

Kant’s theory has often been misconstrued as implying that animals and nature are valuable only as resources to satisfy unreflective human wants. For Kant, however, properly relating to the environment is an important part of a fully moral life. Our treatment of animals affects who we are, so we are obligated to treat them well even when we use them to accomplish our ends; and, as we will see in chapter 2, the appreciation of natural beauty prepares us to act rightly, without a concern for our personal interests. Although we are distinguished from animals and plants by our rationality, we must understand ourselves to be the products of nature’s teleological development, and so we should not view nature merely as a thing to be used and discarded. This change in our intellectual orientation, as well as the recognition that our treatment of the environment and nonhuman animals affects our moral character, have the combined effect of justifying a number of animal and environmental protections. Thus the conclusions of Kant’s moral philosophy converge in many ways with those who believe in advancing animal welfare or preserving the environment due to their intrinsic worth.

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Matthew C. Altman.
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Because of this convergence, environmental ethicists have been wrong to exclude Kantian anthropocentrism from the debate over how and why we ought to protect animals and the environment. Our legal and moral traditions are steeped in anthropocentrism, and typically restrictions on our behavior are justified by noting the effect that animal cruelty and environmental degradation have on human flourishing. Given our intellectual heritage – the fact that in general people are anthropocentric – and in the absence of convincing evidence for the intrinsic worth of animals and nature, we should accept Kant’s moral philosophy not as the correct environmental ethic (although it may be), but strategically, as a discursive resource to achieve the practical aims of environmentalism.

**Kant’s Logocentrism**

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 nonrational things 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” (G 412; see also MM 392). Christine Korsgaard describes this as a kind of “reflective distance” between what one is naturally inclined to and what one decides to do. Animals follow their strongest desire – to eat, to avoid harm, to reproduce, etc. – and heliotropic plants respond to the position of the sun, but neither animals nor plants are capable of acting on the basis of reasons.

What Kant means by humanity – what gives us dignity and makes us worthy of respect – is the capacity to act autonomously, the ability to do what is right simply because it is right. Because of this, we sometimes hold people morally and legally responsible for their actions. Although animals’ actions are attributable to them – dogs and horses do things, after all – animals are not held accountable for what they do. To be sure, some animals act in ways that may initially look like they are motivated by an ethical concern for their fellow animals. For example, chimpanzees help one another, have complex social structures, and ostracize members of the group that engage in antisocial behavior. However, reactive social formations do not indicate moral deliberation and judgment about the wrongness of an action. The needs of the group members are valued (in some broad sense of valuing), but they are at best evolutionary precursors of what becomes in human beings a thoughtful concern for other people’s rights and dignity. Even Frans de Waal, who has spent his career showing how closely humans and primates are related, stops short of attributing moral agency to them.
He claims that, although some animals (such as chimpanzees) have the building blocks of a moral life—sympathy, cooperation, the ability to follow social rules—they do not engage in what could properly be described as autonomous moral reasoning:

> Even if animals other than ourselves act in ways tantamount to moral behavior, their behavior does not necessarily rest on deliberations of the kind we engage in. It is hard to believe that animals weigh their own interests against the rights of others, that they develop a vision of the greater good of society, or that they feel lifelong guilt about something they should not have done.

For Kant, following or not following social norms is not “tantamount to moral behavior.” Only rational beings are capable of the reflective deliberation that is necessary for moral agency, and because of this only human beings are directly morally considerable. Kant equates the class of moral patients, those to whom we have direct obligations, with the class of moral agents, and he limits moral agency to human beings. Nonrational animals are not persons in the morally relevant sense of the term.

Moral agency is also different from a being’s capacity merely to think or to reason more generally. Although some animals have more intellectual capabilities than human infants—for example, chimpanzees form mental representations of themselves, have rudimentary languages, can empathize with others, and can discern cause-and-effect relationships—Kant does not claim that intelligence makes someone worthy of moral consideration. Being able to think in this sense is not the same thing as the reflective distance by which one is capable of acting for the sake of duty. For Kant, it is the latter capacity that makes someone worthy of respect.

When rational beings are responsible for what they do, they decide which ends to pursue. For something to be good for me, it is not enough that I want it. I have to decide that it is something that I ought to try to get. As Kant puts it, I am the sort of being who sets my ends. Because I must decide that I ought to pursue something in order for it to be good for me, the capacity to decide things and determine what is good is a condition of all other goods, and therefore has absolute value. This leads to the version of the categorical imperative known as the formula of humanity: “So act that you use humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means” (G 429). Persons have intrinsic worth because they are rational, whereas the worth of nonrational things is relative to human needs and tastes, insofar as they can be used to advance human purposes (G 434–6, 427–8). Apart from humanity, nothing in nature is good in itself; all nonrational beings are (or may be) only instrumentally good.

By claiming that only humanity has intrinsic worth, Kant seems to be advancing a form of anthropocentrism, which values human beings over
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all other species. However, Kant is not privileging human beings per se, but the capacity to reason that many human beings have. Therefore, Kant’s view is better characterized as what Allen Wood calls “logocentrism,” a position “based on the idea that rational nature, and it alone, has absolute and unconditional value.” Of course, the implications of logocentrism are (for the most part) the same as those of anthropocentrism: human beings are included but plants, animals, and ecosystems are excluded from direct moral considerability. For Kant, rainforests and chimpanzees are morally equivalent to bricks and chairs, in the sense that all of them are in the same class, nonrational things, “with which one can do as one likes” (A 127). Kant echoes the biblical idea that animals are “gifts of nature” given to human beings by God:

The first time [the human being] said to the sheep: Nature has given you the skin you wear not for you but for me, then took it off the sheep and put it on himself (Genesis 3:21), he became aware of a prerogative that he had by his nature over all animals, which he now no longer regarded as his fellow creatures, but rather as means and instruments given over to his will for the attainment of his discretionary aims [beliebigen Absichten]. (CB 114)

According to Kant, we have obligations only to ourselves and other rational agents, so we can use plants, animals, and whole ecosystems as resources to accomplish any human purposes and satisfy any human desires – our “beliebigen Absichten” – without restriction. Environmental ethics is an oxymoron.

Kant’s Justification for Our Duties (with Regard) to Nonrational Animals

Because of the absolute value of humanity, a rational being has moral duties toward himself, such as developing his talents and not committing suicide, and toward others, such as acting beneficently and not lying (G 421–3, 429–30). Although we have direct duties only to rational beings, Kant also claims that we have a number of indirect duties, and it is here where we see how Kant restricts our behavior in ways that are consistent with non-anthropocentric positions in environmental ethics.

With regard to animals in particular, Kant begins by noting that our treatment of them has an impact on our character. To use Kant’s more technical terminology, how a person behaves toward animals affects his disposition (Gesinnung), “the first subjective ground of the adoption of the maxims,” which orders his given incentives according to adopted standards of practical self-determination (Rel 25). Because our moral choices are the result of our
character, and because our character is shaped (among other things) by how we treat nonrational animals, behaving cruelly toward animals would ultimately affect the kind of people we are and the principles upon which we choose to act. Hence, we have duties to animals, but only indirectly – that is, because of how our behavior toward animals impacts us:

Any action whereby we may torment animals, or let them suffer distress, or otherwise treat them without love, is demeaning to ourselves. It is inhuman, and contains an analogy of violation of the duty to ourselves, since we would not, after all, treat ourselves with cruelty; we stifle the instinct of humaneness within us and make ourselves devoid of feeling; it is thus an indirect violation of humanity in our own person. (LE 710; see also MM 443; LE 459)

To say that we have indirect duties to animals is a bit misleading. Properly speaking, we have indirect duties to persons through our treatment of animals. We should not treat animals cruelly because doing so coarsens our sensitivity to others’ suffering, a view that psychologists now call the “violence graduation hypothesis.” If the pain we cause sentient beings (including some animals) does not arouse our sympathy, if we become more desensitized to it the more we inflict it, then it becomes less likely that causing a person pain will concern us. Parallel cases include shooting a dog or allowing a horse to starve when they have served us well over the course of their lives (LE 459, 710). A lack of gratitude toward such animals reflects and reinforces a similar feeling toward people to whom we are indebted. Despite many differences, animals are similar enough to human beings that treating animals badly progressively undermines our consideration for human animals. Animal cruelty ultimately erodes our moral virtue.

Our obligations regarding the treatment of animals are often similar to our obligations to rational beings – refraining from gratuitous cruelty, for example – but the fundamental difference is that we can only have direct duties to rational beings, and to animals indirectly because of our duty to ourselves. I should not unnecessarily harm other people because I ought to respect them. I should treat animals well because if I do not, I will become callous to suffering, which undermines my attempt to develop a virtuous character. This is a crucial premise in Kant’s argument for indirect duties to animals, and there is evidence to support it.

I will be more likely to harm other people if I enjoy making animals suffer, and this is morally significant. However, Kant is most concerned with how enjoying or ignoring the suffering of animals corrupts me. It makes me a bad person who, incidentally, is also more likely to disregard others’ feelings, which I ought to consider when I make a moral decision. As Barbara Herman puts it, we ought to refrain from unnecessarily harming animals “because indifference and insensitivity are hostile to reason, to
getting things right, and therefore not part of justified ways of acting.” If I disregard others’ suffering, then I am not deliberating correctly. The right treatment of animals, if it is done for the right reason, reflects a kind of self-respect rather than a respect for the animals themselves.

When someone confuses these kinds of duties and believes that animals themselves are worthy of respect, Kant says that the person is committing “an amphibology in his concepts of reflection,” or a logical fallacy that results from an ambiguous use of terms (MM 442). There is an ambiguity in saying that we have duties to animals, and those who claim that animals (or plants, or ecosystems) have intrinsic worth play on this ambiguity. As Kant puts it, we can have duties “with regard to [in Ansehung]” animals but not “to [gegen]” animals, which Kant classifies as merely “(nonhuman) objects” (MM 442). So, there are moral reasons to treat animals well (or at least not badly), but it would be a mistake to conclude from this that animals themselves constrain us, independently of how our treatment of them impacts our dispositions.

Implications of Kant’s View for Our Treatment of Animals

Defenders of animal rights and utilitarians who promote animal welfare – typically represented by Tom Regan and Peter Singer, respectively – do not accept Kant’s approach precisely because it protects animals only to encourage human virtue. Still, it is important to emphasize that Kant does think animals are deserving of moral consideration; the treatment of animals is not a conceptual blind spot within his practical philosophy. Even though the duties are indirect and “with regard to” animals, we have moral duties nonetheless. It is cruel to cause sentient beings unnecessary pain, whether or not they are rational agents. While it is not wrong apart from its impact on us, the cruelty of the act is wrong. Like Regan and Singer, Kant criticizes the mistreatment of animals in strong and morally significant terms.

In fact, the conclusions Kant reaches concerning our specific duties coincide with much of what is advanced by Regan and Singer. Kant claims that we ought to be concerned with the pain and comfort of animals, and that we ought to minimize their suffering even when doing so serves no immediate human purpose. For example, Kant says that we should not “strain [domestic animals] beyond their capacity” (MM 443). Even if working animals to death would maximize profits and make our lives a lot easier, we have a moral obligation that overrides these desires. We ought to be concerned with their comfort and well-being. Kant also says that hunting animals for sport is immoral (LE 460). The fact that a person takes pleasure in it is irrelevant.
Additionally, Kant’s position on animal testing is fairly strict: “agonizing physical experiments for the sake of mere speculation, when the end could also be achieved without these, are to be abhorred” (MM 443). Kant would not prohibit the use of animals in all experiments – neither would Singer – but it is important to note that the pain animals feel puts the justificatory burden on those who want to engage in animal testing. Human interests do not automatically trump animal interests. Killing or maiming animals to develop such things as cosmetics is prohibited, because this end is even less important than “mere speculation.” It is possible to develop a cruelty-free product. Having no concern for the intense suffering of animals that undergo routine poisoning in testing labs, and thinking that such suffering is worth it because we desperately need yet another kind of lipstick, clearly seems hard-hearted. Medical testing may have greater potential benefits than cosmetic testing, but it is crucial to determine whether animal suffering is avoidable. If we can get the same results without killing countless animals in painful experiments, then endorsing such tests amounts to a callous disregard of others’ pain. If there are often alternatives to painful medical testing, as some now claim there are, then Kant would rule out animal testing in most cases, even when health benefits for persons could be achieved.

Whether we can kill animals for food is less clear. Kant certainly thinks that there are restrictions on how we treat animals that we eat: he says that they must be killed as quickly and painlessly as possible (MM 443). Kant would condemn the deplorable conditions around factory farming. Livestock animals produced through breeding and genetic engineering experience chronic pain, disease, and premature death; crowded pens and feedlots do not allow animals to express their natural instincts, causing stress and self-injurious behavior; and all of this is followed by the cramped and cold transportation to the slaughter plant, then electrical stunning, putting bolts through their brains, hanging animals upside down and slitting their throats, etc. The fact that many people are unaware of the conditions under which their meat is produced does not exempt them from moral criticism. As Dan Egonssson notes, “if you are a deliberate meat eater, that does not automatically mean that you practise cruelty to animals in a direct fashion. But you will in one way accept the fact that animals are treated the way they are in the animal factories.” Willful ignorance does not excuse people from their moral duties. If we have an indirect duty to make sure that animals are not mistreated, then we have an obligation to determine whether the meat we are eating comes from mistreated animals. Egonssson extends Kant’s claim that “he who is cruel to animals becomes hard also in his dealing with men” (LE 459) to insist that “he who accepts cruelty to non-human animals will eventually accept cruelty also to people.”
Kant would condemn sacrificing animals simply because we like the taste of meat. We would be overlooking the pain of animals for our own pleasure, the essence of a callous disregard for others. If meat were necessary to keep us alive and healthy, then killing animals humanely would be justified in order to advance our existence as rational and natural beings. But most of us, who have access to nutritionally equivalent alternatives, can live just as healthily with a vegetarian diet. If we tacitly support incredible amounts of animal suffering because of a shallow desire for the taste of animal flesh, it dulls our moral sensitivity, as it does that of butchers who, Kant says, become “inured to death” (LE 459–60). Arguably, this limitation on meat-eating, short of absolute prohibition, is consistent with Singer’s own position. Kant condemns neglecting our duties in order to satisfy our inclinations, the latter of which are only conditionally good. If accepting the cruel treatment of livestock damages a person’s character, and if we only eat animals because we like to do so, then most of us ought to become vegetarians.

As I said, Kant does not rule out the killing of animals in principle. For example, indigenous peoples in isolated lands would be allowed to hunt animals in order to survive. If a developing country had to choose between putting money into more expensive but more humane agricultural practices and investing in adequate health care or nutrition for human beings, the human beings are privileged. However, the implications of Kant’s position here do not contradict animal rights and animal welfare theories. Regan discusses so-called lifeboat scenarios in which the choice is between saving an animal and saving a person, and he argues that the human should be saved in such cases because of the minimal principle: if someone’s rights must be harmed, then we must do what we can to minimize the harm. Because opportunities for preference satisfaction are greater for the person than for the animal, the person’s death would be a greater prima facie loss. Kant reaches the same conclusion. Therefore, by explaining why we should minimize animal suffering based on anthropocentric principles, Kant’s views go a long way toward eradicating meat-eating in many developed nations, making the practice more humane in others, and (like Singer and Regan) explaining why it is justified in rare circumstances.

Of course, most of us are unaware of the conditions under which animals are housed and slaughtered. That is why Singer’s Animal Liberation was and is a life-changing book for many people: it makes them aware of the cost in animal suffering caused by their predilection for meat. However, it also poses a problem for Kant. If we are ignorant of what goes on in factory farms, then our character would not be affected by what happens there. Egonsson says that we would be “accepting” animal cruelty, and in a sense we would be, since we would not be condemning it and our meat purchases would be financing it. However, in another sense, we are not approving it
either, because most of us are simply unaware of it or do not think about it. It is a tacit acceptance, but that does not necessarily mean that we embrace it or that this kind of acceptance actually corrupts our character. If we do not consider it at all, then animal cruelty in the meat industry would seem to have no effect on our moral attitudes. Kant’s position would seem to imply that ignorance is a good thing in this case, because while we remain ignorant, we can satisfy our desires by using nonrational creatures, and without any negative side effects for us. The more hidden from view animal slaughter is, the better it is in a moral sense. This seems like an odd implication for Kant’s position.

There are two different responses that the Kantian vegetarian could make to this line of argument. One response the Kantian could not give is to say that it is wrong to remain ignorant of animal suffering, because animal suffering is bad in itself and we ought to become aware of it as a first step in ending a wrong. If, as Kant claims, we have only indirect duties to ourselves through animals, then there is nothing morally objectionable about animal suffering unless it affects our character and, because of that, we treat other rational beings poorly. We have no obligation to become aware of something that is in itself morally neutral.

So, how would remaining ignorant of or unconcerned with animal suffering affect our character in a negative way? First, cultivating this lack of concern with animals whose suffering is not immediately apparent to us may encourage this kind of blindness with regard to the suffering of humans whose plights are not brought to our attention, and this does have an impact on our virtue. Although this psychological connection is not as clear or well documented as the violence graduation hypothesis, not caring about the suffering of nonrational creatures may affect our attitudes toward the suffering of others, especially those who have traditionally been thought to be less than fully rational, such as women and people in the so-called Third World. If we encourage ignorance of animal suffering, then we may also encourage ignorance of human suffering in places such as Africa, which gets relatively little media attention in the West. The latter ignorance is morally blameworthy.

Second, supporting the meat industry financially through one’s food dollars also supports jobs for people who kill the animals and whose sensitivity to others’ suffering is being coarsened. I have an obligation to improve my own character, but I also have an obligation not to corrupt others. For those who slaughter the animals and those who are aware of animal suffering and do nothing about it, the meat industry is morally dangerous. When I buy meat, I am funding an industry that pays people to, for the most part, disregard animal harm. My direct duty not to further those people’s morally inappropriate ends may imply that I have an indirect duty to protect the animals they would kill. Of course, this argument,
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however plausible, is more tenuous than Kant’s earlier claims about our duty not to mistreat animals that we affect directly with our own actions. Still, it shows that Kant is not entirely silent even regarding such recent inventions as factory farms.

Kantians Revising Kant: Wood and Korsgaard

Allen Wood rejects Kant’s approach to animal welfare because, he says, it fails to capture “why most of us think we should cherish natural beauty and care about the welfare of other living things” – namely, that nature and animals deserve to be valued for their own sake. Wood also worries that Kant’s prohibition on wanton cruelty rests on a contingent premise that, conceivably, could change our obligations depending on what we are like:

if it happened to be a quirk of human psychology that torturing animals would make us that much kinder toward humans (perhaps by venting our aggressive impulses on helpless victims), then Kant’s argument would apparently make it a duty to inflict gratuitous cruelty on puppies and kittens so as to make us that much kinder to people.23

To avoid Kant’s “repugnant” argument strategy, Wood presents an alternative that is Kantian in spirit but rejects what Wood calls the “personification principle”: the idea that every duty must be to a person, because only persons have humanity.24 Instead, Wood claims we also ought to respect things that are not themselves rational, but that “bear the right relations to rational nature” – that is, things that have “fragments,” “necessary conditions,” or “the infrastructure, so to speak, of rational nature.”25 Many animals experience pleasure and pain, and such animals have preferences (in some sense) for pleasure over pain. This is part of the “natural teleology” that human beings share with animals. By satisfying the natural desires that we have – the desire for food and drink, the basic will to live – we protect our physical integrity and maintain our existence as rational beings. But that means that the conditions that make possible our rational existence are good. In addition, acting on preferences is part of or similar to what it means to be an end-setter. One pursues what one takes to be good. Such natural purposiveness ought to be advanced in both persons and non-rational things because it is the “infrastructure” of our own rational nature.26

In short, Wood claims, human beings ought to respect animals that resemble rational beings in the correct, morally relevant way.

Christine Korsgaard also tries to extend Kant’s philosophy to justify direct duties to animals, and in a way that goes beyond Wood’s position. While Wood thinks that we ought to give animals moral consideration
because they have elements or necessary conditions of rationality, Korsgaard claims that animals are valuers in the relevant sense of the term:

in general, although not infallibly, an animal experiences the satisfaction of its needs and the things that will satisfy them as desirable or pleasant, and assaults on its being as undesirable or unpleasant. These experiences are the basis of its incentives, making its own good the end of its actions. In that sense, 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.  

Here Korsgaard says that, because animals have a “point of view” on their own well-being, they and human beings value things in a similar way. Although nonhuman animals are not rational, they have a sense of good and bad, and they are capable of pursuing one and avoiding the other on the basis of incentives. Korsgaard even goes so far as to say that “pain [even in animals] is the perception of a reason.” That is morally relevant. Elsewhere Korsgaard compares animals to what Kant calls “passive citizens,” people such as women and children who are not allowed to participate in forming legislation but who nonetheless are protected under the law (MM 314–15). Animals do not give themselves the moral law—they are not self-legislating agents—but they are worthy of moral consideration by those who do. This is so because, as organisms, they maintain themselves in such a way that things can be good or bad with regard to their own teleological development, and they are aware of this. Like Regan, who calls animals “subjects of a life,” Korsgaard says that some animals have a “sense of self,” or that being an animal is “a way of being someone.”

Korsgaard admits that what is good for an animal is not intrinsically good; value depends on our determining that something is valuable. But we do take our continued existence as animal beings to be (conditionally) good. We cannot commit suicide or starve ourselves to death without undermining what we affirm to be good in willing at all— that is, in willing, we take our capacity to will, and our existence as a willing being, to be a good thing. But if we and nonrational animals share this capacity for things to matter to us, then, according to Korsgaard, our affirming the pursuit of natural goods extends both to rational and nonrational beings:

The strange fate of being an organic system that matters to itself is one that we share with the other animals. In taking ourselves to be ends-in-themselves 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.
Ironically, Korsgaard accepts Kant’s claim that value is the result of our reasoning about what ends we will pursue and deciding what is worthwhile, yet she rejects the argument that, as a condition of all other goods, humanity alone is an end in itself. Instead, she says that valuing the capacity to reason commits us to valuing our natural existence, which is a good thing for us, and that valuing our natural existence commits us to valuing the natural existence of other organisms that, like us, care about their well-being. Korsgaard thus follows Wood by appealing to the fact that an organism’s natural development can be thwarted, and by inferring from this a normatively constraining conception of good and bad for the organism itself.

Wood and Korsgaard disagree in some ways. In particular, Wood criticizes Korsgaard for intimating that natural purposiveness is sufficient for something to be a valuer. Wood also does not go so far as to claim that animals are moral subjects or ends in themselves. However, Wood’s and Korsgaard’s positions overlap on the most important point, namely that the purposiveness of organic beings makes them directly morally considerable. While Korsgaard claims that “life is a form of morality” because striving for some good is a kind of valuing, Wood claims that we ought to promote natural teleology even in nonrational beings because it is part of the “infra-structure” of rational nature:

If respect for the rational nature served by this natural teleology requires that it not be thwarted or frustrated, then once we are free of the restrictions of the personification principle it seems reasonable to extend this argument and claim that respect for rational nature requires similar constraints regarding the natural teleology in nonrational living things.

The differences between Wood and Korsgaard, then, are not so great. Korsgaard says that an animal is a valuer because of inner purposiveness, and Wood says that an animal is like a valuer because of inner purposiveness. From the fact that animals have this natural teleology – that things can be good or bad with regard to their preferences, or that things matter to them – both Wood and Korsgaard conclude that animals are deserving of direct moral consideration. Such purposes do not support moral reasoning in nonhuman animals, but for Wood and Korsgaard that is not important. What is important is that, because this natural teleology supports our rational nature, it ought to be respected in general.

Problems with Wood and Korsgaard

Plants also have the natural teleology to nourish themselves and reproduce, so plants would also seem to be objects of direct moral concern. Korsgaard
agrees that things can be good or bad for a plant, although not in as deep a sense as they can be for an animal, since plants do not have a “point of view” on how they are affected. They have no preferences per se. Korsgaard concludes that plants may also have moral standing, but to a lesser degree. If Wood believes that a plant’s striving for self-preservation is not robust enough to be considered a “fragment” of rational nature, he does not give any reason for why that is.

By isolating natural teleology as a sufficient condition of moral considerability, Wood and Korsgaard are appealing to the fact that something that develops or lives and grows continues to do so only under certain conditions, and that undermining those conditions thwarts the achievement of its aim. They follow the logic of environmental ethicists who claim that animals, species, and ecosystems have intrinsic value because things can be good or bad for them, given their organization and development. For example, in his defense of biocentrism, Paul Taylor characterizes animals and plants as “teleological centers of life,” each with its own point of view: each organism “carries on its existence in the (not necessarily conscious) pursuit of its good.” Holmes Rolston III says that value makes sense with regard to plant activity because of their purposiveness, regardless of the fact that they are not aware of it: “though things do not matter to plants, things matter for them.” Kenneth Goodpaster goes so far as to say that living organisms such as plants have interests – not only things that are good and bad for them, but actual interests, just as human beings have interests – and that this is sufficient for them to be directly morally considerable.

Following this line of thinking, Wood says that we are obligated not to frustrate a thing’s “natural teleology,” and Korsgaard says that “a living thing is a thing for which the preservation of identity is imperative.” Anything that maintains itself is an independent source of value, because things can be good or bad with regard to its own purposive activity. Therefore, animals have preferences and, perhaps, plants have interests, just as human beings have preferences that advance their existence as natural beings. If natural purposiveness is what is morally relevant, then all living organisms are directly morally considerable because things may frustrate or promote their teleological development. Although most environmental ethicists accept this, it takes us a long way from Kant.

Of course, Korsgaard and Wood do not simply reject Kant’s ethics in favor of utilitarianism or some opposing theory, as someone such as Singer does. They begin with the very Kantian idea that rational nature must be valued, but they extend that to include animals that are enough like us that they too ought to be part of the moral community. Animals’ lives have intrinsic value because they have preferences that they try to satisfy, or because they are aware of how they are affected, negatively or positively. The latter criterion (at least) is not shared by plants. Such characteristics
are similar enough to the valuing that we engage in as rational beings, and that makes it a bad thing for animals to suffer, or for their ends to be thwarted. For Wood and Korsgaard, as for Kant, man is the measure of all things: rational beings remain the paradigm case of ends in themselves, and animals only have value “because our own legislation makes it so.”

Wood and Korsgaard are Kantians, or at least they try to remain Kantians. However, their attempts to revise Kant jettison something that is central and foundational to Kant’s moral theory as a whole – namely, Kant’s anthropocentrism. The categorical imperative states that humanity is an end in itself, and Kant defines humanity in terms of the capacity to act autonomously (G 435). Kant strictly contrasts this with natural purposiveness. Being able to act in accordance with principles is what separates rational beings from mere things, including nonrational animals, whose behavior is entirely determined by natural laws (G 412). Jacques Derrida claims that modern philosophy defines what is proper to persons by distinguishing us from animals, by constructing our concept of animals such that they lack the characteristics required for moral consideration. Kant is no exception. Humanity is defined by its ability to free the subject from animal inclinations; our animal nature is a constant threat to what reason requires us to do. The appeal to an organism’s natural development, then, is directly opposed to a foundational assumption of Kant’s ethics. Wood and Korsgaard claim that animals are directly morally considerable because they are like us, but Kant contends that we are moral agents with dignity precisely because we are not like animals. Korsgaard’s and Wood’s approaches are Kantian only in the very broadest sense: rational autonomy is still the standard for moral considerability. What matters is not that animals suffer (as it does for the utilitarian), but that their activity is enough like rational activity to make them matter. Kant’s moral theory, however, is predicated on the idea that being self-motivated is not equivalent to choosing one’s ends.

The “infrastructure” or “conditions” of reasoning are not important for their own sake, but as means to the only thing that is an end in itself: our humanity. The natural teleology of human beings is worth promoting because it does in fact support our capacity to be entirely motivated by rational constraints. For example, Kant says that we have a natural desire for food and drink, and that this natural desire should not be abused, either by depriving ourselves or by indulging too much, because doing so would impair our rational faculties (MM 427). Eating and drinking are not good simply because we are naturally inclined to them, but because they support our capacity to reason. Reason is what makes us capable of acting autonomously, and it is that by virtue of which we have dignity (G 435–6). Where the capacity to act for the sake of duty is absent – in cows, clams, and ferns – there is no morally relevant value.
Kant’s Response to Wolff: The Difference between Animal Choice and Moral Agency

It should be noted that Kant is not oversimplifying what it is for animals to act, as if they are wholly determined by fight-or-flight reflex. Kant rejects Descartes’s assertion that animals are mere machines, and he grants that they act on the basis of representations of the world (Ak 2:60; LM 28:449, 690; CJ 464n). Kant even says that animals share with us a capacity to choose (LE 344; MM 442; Ak 28:117). But animal choice is very different from rational self-determination. Indeed, Kant claims that our difference from animals is what distinguishes us, makes us moral agents, and gives us our dignity. Without delving too deeply into Kant’s philosophical predecessors, it is instructive to explain Kant’s own theory of freedom as he contrasts it with the work of Christian Wolff, for Kant’s response to Wolff clarifies how Kant conceives of and values so-called “animal choice.”

Following G. W. Leibniz, Wolff claims that the soul possesses the power of forming representations, which facilitate its knowledge and move it to action. What determines the soul is its desire for perfection, which Wolff defines as the ability of some combination of parts to work toward a unified purpose – for example, the parts of an eye functioning to achieve faultless vision. Through God, the most perfect being, all things in the world have some degree of perfection, and the soul perceives it either confusedly through sensuous desires or clearly through higher desires. Because the soul necessarily strives to realize the greatest degree of perfection, its representation of perfection is both the cause and motive of the will. The soul is formally self-determined through its own representations of the world, and the content of its rational choices is determined by the perfection of things in the world. For example, we form an opinion about how perfect vision is achieved, and based on that opinion we are compelled to try to accomplish that end. In other words, while the decision to maximize perfection comes from individual agents and their interpretation of what is given to them, the ends that they pursue are given from without. What makes vision faultless depends on the natural properties of things. The structure of being necessitates us to act in certain ways given the nature of the rational soul.43

Wolff’s account of human freedom sounds a lot like Wood’s and Korsgaard’s descriptions of animal activity. According to Wood, natural teleology is an inner principle that motivates animals to achieve what they take to be good (or more perfect, to use Wolff’s terminology). An animal tries to satisfy its preferences in order to thrive. Similarly, Korsgaard claims that “experiences are the basis of [an animal’s] incentives” – she could have easily have said “representations” instead of “experiences” – and that the animal “pursues its good” in response to those experiences.44 Like human
beings, animals evaluate the world and act on the basis of those evaluations, even if, unlike human beings, animals are necessitated by their biological drives. Kant concedes that this is a kind of choice because an animal’s behavior is not random and it is determined by the animal’s own biological drives, based on its representations, rather than by external causes. In fact, he says that, like all living things, animals have “a faculty for practicing actions in conformity with one’s representations” (LM 28:594). Animals are end-directed, just as human beings are.

Although the Wolffian agent chooses, the agent is constrained by a material end (perfection) that is given to the will rather than being self-legislated. Kant gives two reasons why such an approach to agency precludes the possibility of moral activity. First, the action is traceable to the agent’s inner life, but the agent is not responsible in the sense that he could have done otherwise. An animal’s action is biologically determined by instinct in conjunction with what is presented to the animal in experience: “This choice is not free, but necessitated by incentives and stimuli” (LE 344; see also LM 28:594). Moral agency is different. A person’s action results from reasoning about what ought to be done and setting his end, sometimes contrary to his inclinations or natural teleology. As Kant phrases it, stimuli have “necessitating power” with animals, but with human beings they have only “impelling power” (LM 28:255).

The second reason why the Wolffian agent is incapable of morality is because the agent’s choice results from the nature of the soul, so his behavior is governed by “rules that are subjectively necessitated” (LE 344). The agent’s pursuit of perfection depends on how his soul is constituted as an empirical fact, but natural laws are not strictly necessary, even if they do apply to all actual agents. As Kant demonstrates in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, only an objective moral law, which constrains rational beings as such, is suited to be the supreme principle of morality (G 408). The appeal to perfection can only give us a hypothetical imperative: if one wills perfection, then one ought to act in a certain way. By contrast, the moral law constrains rational beings as a categorical imperative, necessarily and universally. The good will gives itself a formal constraint – that maxims be universalizable – rather than being heteronomously conditioned by the nature of the soul or by biological drives (G 443–4).

Kant calls the Wolffian subject an “automaton . . . spirituale” that is “driven by representations,” and he characterizes this kind of freedom as predetermined spontaneity, “the freedom of a turnspit” (CPrR 97; see also Ak 17:313–14 [R 3855]). A being who attempts to maximize perfection has the capacity for choice (Willkür), because it discriminates among possible ends and acts based on its preferences. However, such a being has only what Kant calls “arbitrium brutum” or “animal choice” (MM 213; CPR A534/B562; LM 28:254–6). When a representation exerts a pull on an animal so that it is moved to act for the sake of that end, the animal acts
on the basis of what it represents to be best: whatever preserves itself, the
species, or its capacity to enjoy life (MM 420). The animal is “pathologi-
cally necessitated” by such given, natural ends and is unable to act other-
wise than to pursue these ends, just as the Wolffian rational agent is
necessitated by the desire for perfection (CPR A534/B562; see also LE
266–7).

Although animals choose to act based on their representation of and
desire for given ends, rational beings are capable of free choice (“arbitrium
liberum”) because they can determine their actions based on what their own
reason requires of them, “independently of necessitation by sensible
impulses.” Kantian agents are “pathologically affected,” in that they want
things that they desire (such as happiness and perfection), but they are able
to be motivated purely by duty (CPR A534/B562; LM 28:254–6). To the
extent that rational beings can act in accordance with principles, they have
wills (Wille) in addition to the power of choice (Willkür) (G 412).

Wood and Korsgaard imply that animals value things in a way that is
morally relevant, because it makes them enough like human agents that
they ought to be directly morally considerable. But for Kant, the capacity
to represent the world and to act on the basis of those representations is
not equivalent to reflecting on those representations and determining what
one ought to do on the basis of rational principles. Kant concludes that
animal instinct is not merely a lesser degree of reason, as Korsgaard and
Wood seem to imply, but is qualitatively distinct from moral judgment (Ak
2:60; LM 28:594, 689–90). Humans and animals are different in kind.

Kant grants that animals have a mental life and that at least some animals
are capable of a kind of choice. They represent the world to themselves and
pursue what is taken to advance their preferences. Korsgaard is right to say
that this amounts to a kind of valuing. But like the Wolffian agent, animals
evaluate possible actions against a given end or set of ends and perform the
actions that are necessary given their empirical makeup, or their natural
teleology. By contrast, rational beings act on principles that are freely
chosen, independently of determination by natural law. This distinguishes
the humanity in persons and makes them worthy of moral respect. Kant
concludes that “if all creatures had [only animal] choice, tied to sensory
drives, the world would have no value” (LE 344). This conclusion is not
simply the result of a bias in favor of human beings, a “personification
principle” that can be discarded, but is rather a reflection on the morally
salient differences between rational beings and animals.

Evaluating Pain and Pleasure

Both human beings and some animals have the capacity for feeling pleasure
and pain, and this is very relevant to understanding our indirect duties
regarding animals. It is precisely because of their similarity to us in this respect that indiscriminately harming animals would retard our empathy for others’ pain. It would corrupt our character. However, we must be careful here not to make an unjustified logical move – an amphiboly – and say that pain is somehow wrong in itself, and that we have a duty to minimize animals’ pain for its own sake. Richard Dean takes Kant in this direction: because we view our own pain as something to be avoided, and because we empathize with nonhuman animals that are also capable of pain, “it seems almost irrational to be aware in this way of the extreme similarity between different beings’ pain and not regard the pains in a similar way.”

The problem with this view is that, although the pains are similar, that pain is bad in a moral sense does not follow simply from the fact that it is unpleasant to a sentient being. Whether pain is bad depends on its relation to our moral capacities, and particularly whether the pain undermines our ability freely to do what is right. Of course, there may be other reasons to minimize animal pain. For example, we may not like the idea of animals being in pain unnecessarily; we may feel for them, and we may feel happier when they are protected. But this is merely a preference. If this were the only consideration and our awareness of animal pain had no impact on our character, then the mere fact of their being in pain would be morally insignificant.

For Kant, we have dignity because of our autonomy, not because we are sentient or have the capacity for preferences. As James Skidmore points out, there are a number of conditions of autonomy for us, including the ability to digest food, but no one would claim that an elaborate machine whose sole function is to break down food and use its nutrients is for that reason worthy of respect. In addition, there are plenty of things that make it possible for us to exist as rational beings, but are not necessary for rational nature in general. God is perfectly rational and has a holy will that is necessarily in conformity with the moral law, but without a body God has no sense of pleasure and pain – that is, God is not like humans and other vertebrates in that God is not sentient. If there is such a thing as a divine preference, it is much different from any kind of desire satisfaction had by humans and animals. In what sense, then, are these things some of the “necessary conditions” of rational nature, rather than part of a human nature that also happens to be rational? This gets to the crux of the issue for Wood’s interpretation. The ability to digest food is necessary for us to exist as rational beings, yet it is not part of the “infrastructure” of rational nature. Sentience is not a necessary condition of rational nature, yet Wood says that it is in the right relation to rational nature (only in us?). By trying to expand the value of rational autonomy to include the “fragments” of rational nature, Wood gives us no clear criteria by which to distinguish beings who are directly morally considerable from those who are not.
Kant agrees with Wood that nonrational animals are like human beings in certain ways; he says that “animals are an analogue [Analogon] of humanity” (LE 459). It is precisely because they are like us – dogs have a sense of loyalty, chickens are aware of pain and pleasure – that our treatment of them has an impact on our character, and thus we have indirect duties not to abuse them. But to say that we have direct duties to nonhuman animals is, as Kant himself says, to commit a logical mistake.

Animal nature is valued by human beings because it supports our capacity to set and pursue ends, not because it has an inner purposiveness. Appealing to natural teleology alone commits the naturalistic fallacy: because something is natural, it is therefore good. Kant himself avoids this error by claiming that desires, even natural desires, are only conditionally good. In fact, the goodness of any of the ends that we or other organisms pursue depends on the presence of a good will (G 393–4). Only a good will has absolute worth and is the proper object of morality; acting for the sake of duty constrains the agent on the basis of reasons rather than what is given by the inclinations. Korsgaard makes much of the fact that animals act on the basis of “incentives,” but for Kant it is the ability to be motivated purely by a concern for duty, to have a particular kind of incentive – a pure incentive – that gives people dignity. We do not deserve direct moral consideration because we can be motivated, but because we can be motivated in the right way.

This is why we have a duty of beneficence to other rational agents. We ought to help people to achieve their goals provided that they are acting in ways that are morally appropriate. However, animals do not hold themselves to the moral law. To treat animals as ends in themselves, as Korsgaard instructs us to, would mean that we must advance their ends, but because such ends are “pursued by animals heteronomously, pathologically, and reactively . . . that would make our actions heteronomously motivated.” In short, we cannot be morally bound by the ends that are set by nature. Kant demonstrates as much in the Groundwork. Such ends are conditionally good depending on what reason requires, which means that we only have indirect duties regarding animals depending on how our treatment of them affects us.

Wood and Korsgaard attempt to remain in the spirit of Kantianism, but end up advancing inadequate positions that contradict the basic tenets of Kant’s moral philosophy. The question then arises as to why they find it necessary to devise new arguments that diverge from Kant’s own avowed position – by rejecting the personification principle, for example – given that Kant endorses many of the most important policies of animal rights and animal welfare philosophies. Kant’s ethics prohibits wanton cruelty toward animals, strictly limits animal experimentation, and, arguably, obligates us to become vegetarians. Why extend direct moral consideration
Applying Kant’s Ethics beyond those with the capacity to set and pursue ends (humanity) to animals that have “fragments” of rational nature or animals for which their “own good matters”?

Kant’s Practical Appeal

Wood and Korsgaard believe that there must be some value to animals apart from how their treatment affects humans, such that we have direct duties to advance their welfare. The idea that there must be something intrinsically wrong with harming animals is, according to many theorists, simply common sense, and if Kant cannot accommodate this, then so much the worse for his moral theory. As mentioned earlier, Wood imagines a hypothetical case in which a person’s character is not adversely affected by animal cruelty. Alexander Broadie and Elizabeth Pybus complain that indirect duties regarding animals apply only to human beings (with our particular psychological associations) rather than to rational beings as such, so animal cruelty may be acceptable for rational beings who are not constituted as we are. All of these critics of Kant are objecting to the fact that his prohibition on animal cruelty rests on what Martha Nussbaum calls “fragile empirical claims about psychology”: Kant’s assertion that not caring about animals’ well-being tends to make us callous toward other persons. Purposely harming animals would be acceptable to Kant if we or other rational beings were not affected by it – if, for example, someone could be kind to other persons while burning stray dogs to death in his spare time.

Although it is true that people who are radically different psychologically would not have duties to animals, it is unclear how this is an objection to Kant’s position, given the fact that it is the case that unnecessarily harming animals corrupts us morally. Many things would have to be different for our indirect duties regarding animals to change: our bodies and behavior and other animals’ bodies and behavior would have to be dramatically dissimilar (that is, there would have to be no analogy between humans and animals), our constitution would have to be such that we fail to identify or sympathize with animals, our character would have to be unaffected or improved by their suffering, and so on. Although the categorical imperative is discovered a priori, Kant is explicit in claiming that the particular duties that follow from it depend on our physical nature, our psychology, and our social circumstances (G 388–9, 410–12; MM 214–18). And empirical data supports Kant’s claim that mistreating animals affects how we treat other human beings. Complaining that, on Kant’s view, our duties to animals rest on a contingent psychological premise is like complaining that, if people did not mind being punched and shoved to the ground, then Kant
would approve of assault and battery. This is not the case, so it is irrelevant.

Nearly every moral theory depends on empirical and psychological facts to justify its condemnation of animal cruelty: utilitarianism would permit torturing animals for fun if animals felt pain less acutely and if it did not influence us to harm others, virtue ethics would condone it if it made us more charitable and benevolent people, etc. It is hardly an objection to any ethical theory that it cannot make some action wrong in every possible world, under any possible circumstances, and with every conceivable agent. Presumably, claiming (against Kant) that animals should be directly considered is meant to make sure that animals are considered even when our moral character is not affected. But if it is affected, whether we are inflicting cruelty on animals or simply allowing it to happen, then we have a number of obligations to animals that involve dramatically reforming our current behavior. We are just as obligated by indirect duties as we are by direct duties. Therefore, Kant’s appeal to indirect duties has no adverse practical implications for how we treat nonrational animals.\textsuperscript{56}

Of course, this response does miss the point a bit. Presumably, those objecting to Kant are claiming that, even if Kant arrives at the same conclusions as those who defend animal welfare, he is doing so for the wrong reasons. Kant’s position lacks what J. Baird Callicott calls “moral truth,” because it does not base its moral judgments on the intrinsic value of non-humans.\textsuperscript{57} The rights of animals and the satisfaction of their preferences should matter for their own sake. If this is true, then Kant’s anthropocentrism is inadequate.

Kant’s position is defensible. It is based on a particular conception of value, and the fact that we are the sorts of beings who set our own ends. The capacity to do so has absolute value, because it is a condition of anything being (taken to be) good for us. This is not some nonsensical prejudice. Rather than argue with Singer and Callicott about the merits of anthropocentrism and what makes someone or something morally considerable, however, it is sufficient for our purposes to emphasize that there are many points of convergence between Kant and animal welfare theorists when it comes to policy and personal behavior. Instead of rejecting Kantianism out of hand, defenders of animal welfare ought to look to Kant as a strategic ally. The main reason is that Kant’s and similar anthropocentric views have been more influential in Western legal and moral thinking than those that refer to animals’ intrinsic, non-instrumental value.

Historically, most jurisdictions have appealed to human interests to justify anti-cruelty laws, and they have treated animals as property rather than as things that are directly morally considerable. In Great Britain and the United States, animal cruelty legislation was first passed in the 1800s, and the stated reason for it was because of the morally corrupting influence
that animal cruelty has on human decency, for those who harm animals and those who witness it. In some cases this was stated explicitly in the statutes, and in others it was affirmed by the courts. For example, in one of the famous Stage Coach Cases involving Henry Bergh, founding president of the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA), the court concluded:

This kind of legislation . . . truly has its origin in the intent to save a just standard of humane feeling from being debased by pernicious effects of bad example – the human heart from being hardened by public and frequent exhibitions of cruelty to dumb creatures, committed to the care and which were created for the beneficial use of man.

Note the biblical reference, used by Kant as well (CB 114), that animals are given by God for us to use. Because of the anthropocentric assumptions here, the mere killing of an animal was not punishable unless it was in conjunction with cruel treatment. While previous legislation had only protected animals as people’s property that should not be damaged, new laws in the 1800s were thought to be a great advance in that animals’ suffering was morally important – but again, only indirectly, because of how it affects our character. This kind of reasoning remains the dominant justification for anti-cruelty laws in the United States. In her wide-ranging survey of such laws, Margit Livingston concludes that “the ‘equality’ view” – that is, the view that animal interests are, like human interests, important in themselves – “arguably has had little effect on laws relating to animals,” and that this view “finds only limited acceptance in our culture and laws.” Despite appeals to common sense by those who defend animal welfare and animal rights, the idea that animals are morally considerable in themselves is largely absent from Western philosophical, religious, and legal thought. We tend to talk about how causing animal suffering or allowing it to continue affects human psychology – noting, for example, that serial killers often begin by torturing animals, or that people who abuse their pets tend also to abuse children and spouses. The latter concern has prompted many U.S. states to enforce animal cruelty laws more strictly in an effort to prevent domestic violence.

The moral privileging of humanity, or at least a focus on the interests and rights of persons, is a common assumption underlying most people’s ethical reasoning. Mary Warnock reports that, despite the many disagreements among the members of her commission on embryo research, they all accepted anthropocentrism, and in fact rejected the claim that it is merely an unjustified prejudice: “We all believed, on that contrary, that it would require justification not to prefer one’s own species to another. Those who thought that an argument was needed to explain why they would save a
human rather than a dog or a fly would themselves be guilty of prejudice.” Other philosophers have claimed that moral reasoning only makes sense within accepted value paradigms, including the anthropocentric paradigm. Whether anthropocentrism can be justified is secondary, because moral reasoning takes place within the system of valuing according to which humanity is privileged. This is why it sounds so intuitive to talk about humans versus animals rather than human animals versus nonhuman animals. In our language, there is a deep distinction in value that is made clear when people are considered different in kind from animals. According to Richard Posner, pro-animal arguments, especially utilitarian arguments, seem “bizarre” within the linguistic conventions and conceptual paradigms that form the starting point for moral reasoning.

Such conventions and paradigms should be critically scrutinized. Not doing so would imply our blind acceptance of the status quo, an embrace of relativism, and a refusal to reason our way to more morally justifiable beliefs. But the fact that people do think this way, as a matter of convention or something else, poses a question of strategy that is not simply theoretical. Given many people’s latent or explicit anthropocentrism – how else could people think that the mass slaughter of chickens, pigs, and cows is justified simply to satisfy our taste? – the more reasonable response by animal welfare theorists would not be to reject Kant’s position (as Singer and Regan do) or to revise it (as Wood and Korsgaard do), but to adopt it when necessary as a coherent argument strategy that makes a convincing case for why our current policies toward animals ought to be reevaluated. In other words, those who are concerned about animal welfare should draw on our existing values in order to justify the more humane treatment of animals. In a culture that still largely tolerates unnecessary animal testing, abominable conditions in factory farms, and the deaths of billions of animals every year for food, the anthropocentric argument is more likely to carry moral weight. Whether Kant is in fact right or wrong – and, as I said, there are strong reasons behind his anthropocentrism – his assumptions are our assumptions. Bringing Kant into the conversation as a defender of animal welfare has the potential to improve our attitudes and behavior toward animals in morally significant ways.

**Final Thoughts for the Nonanthropocentrist**

Of course, the debate over whether we have direct duties to animals should continue, as should the debate as to whether Kant’s approach is more effective in changing our behavior. One could argue, for example, that Kant’s basic anthropocentric assumptions overshadow the animal-friendly implications of his position. If we emphasize that rationality belongs only to human
beings and that this is the basis of direct moral considerability, it may make our awareness of the analogy between animals and humans less likely, and it may undermine the recognition of how our treatment of animals affects us. Perhaps the analogy between rational beings and animals is submerged under Kant’s logocentrism, leaving us only with the idea that the crucial differences between us and them give us “dominion over nature.” In this case, Kant’s philosophy would not be practically useful in advancing the aims of animal welfare.

This is a psychological thesis that needs as much empirical support as the purported link between animal cruelty and human cruelty. But it is important to recognize that such a debate over Kant’s usefulness occurs within the field of animal welfare ethics. We should evaluate the truth and the practical value of Kant’s ethics, but the fact that Kant is an anthropocentricist does not by itself imply that his views are contrary to the values and aims of animal welfare theory, or that Kant has nothing to contribute to debates over environmental policy.

In environmental ethics generally, anthropocentrism is often used as a kind of slur, similar to racism or sexism. As we have seen, however, Kant’s anthropocentrism is not some baseless prejudice, but is actually backed up by a sophisticated value theory. There are good reasons to be an anthropocentricist, at least in one’s moral foundations. And if we look closely at Kant’s own applications of his theory, we can see that this sort of foundational anthropocentrism does not disregard the suffering of nonhuman animals. In fact, Kant’s ethics can be a solid and politically effective basis for advancing their interests.

Notes

2. Frans de Waal, *Good Natured: The Origins of Right and Wrong in Humans and Other Animals* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996), 209. Some recent books on animal behavior attempt to blur the line between humans and nonhuman animals when it comes to morality. They claim that all of us, humans and animals alike, feel empathy for others, engage in cooperative relationships, and have a commitment to justice, in the sense that we are expected to adhere to social expectations or else risk punishment, usually ostracism from the group. See especially Marc Bekoff, *The Emotional Lives of Animals: A Leading Scientist Explores Animal Joy, Sorrow, and Empathy — and Why They Matter* (Novato, Calif.: New World Library, 2007), and Marc Bekoff and Jessica Pierce, *Wild Justice: The Moral Lives of Animals* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009). Like de Waal, however, these authors distinguish between morality (or “prosocial” behavior) and ethics. Morality is the
set of rules that govern social cooperation and is synonymous with culturally relative, or “species-relative,” customs and manners. For Kant, such rule-following is not what it means to engage in practical reasoning. The categorical imperative is not a social norm, but a self-legislated constraint on the maxims that we choose to adopt. Research into animal cognition and behavior does not support the idea that nonhuman animals engage in such reasoning or are responsible in the requisite sense. Peter Carruthers has emphasized this distinction, arguing that animals are incapable of the long-term planning, representation of different possible futures, and conceptualization of social rules that are requisite for rational agency (The Animals Issue: Moral Theory in Practice [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992], 122–45). For a different view of animals, one that attributes reflection and deliberation, even a degree of autonomy, to some higher animals, see David DeGrazia, Taking Animals Seriously: Mental Life and Moral Status (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), esp. 166–210.


5 It is common for critics of Kant’s ethics to confuse the ability to think with the ability to decide what to do—that is, to confuse rudimentary problem-solving with engaging in practical reasoning. For example, see Christina Hoff, “Immoral and Moral Uses of Animals,” New England Journal of Medicine 302, no. 2 (10 Jan. 1980): 115–18 (p. 115).

6 Christina Hoff and David DeGrazia both overlook this argument in support of the categorical imperative’s formula of humanity. They think that human dignity is merely asserted, that Kant puts forward as an axiom the idea that rational beings are ends in themselves, in contrast to animals. See Hoff, “Kant’s Invidious Humanism,” 66, and DeGrazia, Taking Animals Seriously, 67–8. However, Kant justifies his position by appealing to a particular conception of value and the idea that human beings have incomparable worth because they set their ends. There is an argument here.


9 The cruel treatment of animals corrupts us because animals are like us in certain important ways—animals are sentient, we are capable of feeling sympathy for them, etc.—not because they have intrinsic value. If we come to ignore the cries and protests of an animal, we are more likely to ignore the cries and protests of a person. Thus Kant has an answer for Mary Anne Warren, who poses what is supposed to be a rhetorical question: “if there were nothing inherently wrong with needlessly harming animals, then why would we expect


Some researchers have challenged the contention that torturing animals leads to other kinds of violence. They claim that children tend to grow out of such violent behavior when they develop impulse control and a greater capacity to empathize with others. For example, see C. E. Climent, M. S. Hyg, and M. D. Ervin, “Historical Data in the Evaluation of Violent Subjects,” Archives of General Psychiatry 27 (1972): 621–4; R. Langevin et al., “Childhood and Family Background of Killers Seen for Psychiatric Assessment: A Controlled Study,” Bulletin of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law 11, no. 4 (1983): 331–41; and Suzanne R. Goodney Lea, Delinquency and Animal Cruelty: Myths and Realities about Social Pathology (El Paso, Tex.: LFB Scholarly Publishing, 2007).

Although the evidence does not conclusively establish a causal link between animal cruelty and interpersonal violence, such a link is widely accepted in the psychiatric community. For a consideration of the different methodologies that may account for the divergent findings, as well as references to other studies, see Alan R. Felthous and Stephen R. Kellert, “Childhood Cruelty to Animals and Later Aggression against People: A Review,” American Journal of Psychiatry 144, no. 6 (June 1987): 710–17, and Catherine Miller, “Childhood Animal


12 There is some debate over whether we have indirect duties to animals because of our duties to ourselves or because of our duties to other people. Lara Denis believes that there are two kinds of indirect duties at work: “perfect duties to ourselves as animal and moral beings,” because we should maintain our natural “susceptibility to love and sympathy”; and “imperfect duties to others (i.e., duties of love) or . . . imperfect duties to oneself,” because we should foster “dispositions that help us practically express morally required appreciation and concern for others” and should also perfect ourselves, particularly our moral dispositions (“Kant’s Conception of Duties Regarding Animals: Reconstruction and Reconsideration,” *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 17, no. 1 [2000]: 405–23 [pp. 408–9]). By contrast, Barbara Herman and Paul Guyer claim that all of our duties regarding nonrational things (animals, nature, etc.) are imperfect duties to oneself. See Herman, *Moral Literacy*, 271–2, and Guyer, *Kant and the Experience of Freedom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 318–30, 373–82. It would go beyond the scope of this chapter to sort this out, although Kant’s claims at LE 710 and MM 443 seem to support Herman’s and Guyer’s view. That is the position I adopt here.

13 Kant focuses on amphibolies in which two divergent terms are thought to be equivalent. In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant identifies amphibolies in which we confuse an empirical claim with a transcendental claim, or in which a concept of reflection is misapplied either to sensibility or to the understanding (CPR A260/B316–A268/B324).

14 See also CPR 160 and LE 459, where Kant praises G. W. Leibniz for sparing an insect and returning it to its leaf after examining it under a microscope.

15 “If one, or even a dozen animals had to suffer experiments in order to save thousands, I would think it right and in accordance with equal consideration of interests that they should do so. This, at any rate, is the answer a utilitarian must give” (Peter Singer, *Practical Ethics*, 2nd edn. [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993], 67). See also Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation*, rev. edn. (New York: HarperPerennial, 2002), 85.

16 In the *Moralphilosophie Collins*, Kant makes it clear that there is no absolute prohibition on our use of animals in experiments, because only rational beings must always be treated as ends: “So when anatomists take living animals to experiment on, that is certainly cruelty, though there it is employed for a good purpose; because animals are regarded as man’s instruments, it is acceptable . . . ” (LE 460). We may test on animals, but our use of them is limited by what is necessary to promote the “good purpose” of advancing human well-being. In the *Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant seems to restrict what could be considered to be a good purpose.

17 For example, see Jean Swingle Greek and C. Ray Greek, *What Will We Do If We Don’t Experiment on Animals? Medical Research for the Twenty-First Century* (Victoria, B.C.: Trafford, 2006), and the various publications available
Applying Kant’s Ethics at the Center for Alternatives to Animal Testing at Johns Hopkins University (caat.jhsph.edu).


20 R. M. Hare claims that “responsible” meat-eating, where animals are subject to more humane forms of animal agriculture such as biodynamic ranching and free-range practices, would actually decrease the aggregate animal pain more than calls for complete abstinence (“Why I Am Only a Demi-Vegetarian,” in Singer and His Critics, ed. Dale Jamieson [Oxford: Blackwell, 1999], 233–46). Singer responds that this kind of farming would continue to encourage attitudes toward animals that lead to their widespread mistreatment. With no principled objection to killing animals, including animals that are capable of forming desires for the future, we would be less vigilant, such that abusive practices would reemerge (Peter Singer, “A Response,” in Singer and His Critics, 325–7). See also Singer, Animal Liberation, 229, and Singer, Practical Ethics, 134.


22 In chapter 7, I will address Kant’s complicity in this tradition.


27 Christine M. Korsgaard, “Fellow Creatures: Kantian Ethics and Our Duties to Animals,” Tanner Lectures on Human Values 24 (2004): 79–110 (pp. 103–4). See also Korsgaard, Sources of Normativity, 152–60. The Neo-Friesian Leonard Nelson defended a similar interpretation of Kant many years before Korsgaard did. Nelson claimed that all beings with interests are persons and that all persons have rights that ought to be respected. Because nonhuman animals have interests, they also have rights. Therefore, we have direct duties to both
humans and animals. Whenever animal interests are in conflict with human interests, we ought to weigh the interests themselves against one another. The kind of being that has the interests, whether human or animal, is irrelevant. This is very similar to what Korsgaard argues, although Nelson goes beyond saying that animals are valuers to claim that animals are in fact full-fledged persons with dignity. See Leonard Nelson, *System of Ethics*, trans. Norbert Guterman (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1956), 97–8, 136–44. The problem is that Kant does not value acting on interests, but the ability to choose among competing interests and the ability to be motivated by a pure interest of reason.

28 Korsgaard, *Sources of Normativity*, 149; emphasis added.
29 Korsgaard, “Fellow Creatures,” 96. I discuss Kant’s views on women and children in chapters 7 and 10, respectively.
30 Regan, *Case for Animal Rights*, 243–8; Korsgaard, “Fellow Creatures,” 103; and Korsgaard, *Sources of Normativity*, 156. There are many similarities between the views of Regan and Korsgaard. Like Korsgaard, Regan refers to the fact that things can be good or bad for (some) animals, and he claims that they are valuers with both self-consciousness and the ability to act on their preferences: “like relevantly similar humans, animals have a life of their own that fares better or worse for them, logically independently of their utility for others. . . . Moreover, while it is admittedly true that animals lack the kind of autonomy required for moral agency, it is false that they lack autonomy in any sense. For animals not only have preferences, they can also act, on their own, to satisfy these preferences” (Regan, *Case for Animal Rights*, 178, 182). Being self-motivated in one’s actions, however, is not what is morally relevant for Kant. The agent must be able to be motivated in the right way.
33 J. Baird Callicott notes that this extension of moral considerability beyond rational beings to all conative beings appears in the work of Arthur Schopenhauer, who (like Wood and Korsgaard) took himself to be properly interpreting Kant’s philosophy (*In Defense of the Land Ethic: Essays in Environmental Philosophy* [Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989], 144). Schopenhauer claims that humans, animals, and indeed all natural things are phenomenal manifestations of the thing in itself, which he identifies as the Will. We overcome the illusion of individualism and separateness by having compassion for the suffering of others, including animals.
34 Korsgaard, *Sources of Normativity*, 152.
36 Korsgaard, “Fellow Creatures,” 102, 106n69.
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What it means for a desire to be natural or unnatural is conceptually problematic. All desires we have occur in nature, in the sense that they are had by human beings and are not implanted in us by some supernatural entity. Saying that some desires are unnatural typically either masks an appeal to divine law, which Kant would reject as a basis of moral prescriptions, or it reflects a mere social prejudice, which most ethical theorists (including Kant) think is morally irrelevant. Typically, when people say that something is unnatural, they simply mean that it is bad, but that again commits the naturalistic fallacy. Kant himself makes this mistake when he condemns homosexuality, as I discuss in chapter 6.

Henry Sidgwick gives clearest voice to this sentiment: “there is general agreement that we ought to treat all animals with kindness, so far as to avoid causing them unnecessary pain; but it is questioned whether this is directly due to sentient beings as such, or merely prescribed as a means of cultivating kindly dispositions towards men. Intuitional moralists of repute have maintained this latter view: I think, however, that Common Sense is disposed to regard this as a hard-hearted paradox, and to hold with Bentham that the pain of animals is per se to be avoided” (The Methods of Ethics [New York: Dourer, 1966], 414).

This example is from Hoff, “Kant’s Invidious Humanism,” 67.
See note 10 above.

Onora O’Neill puts it this way: “in allowing that harming non-human animals is an indirect violation of duties to humanity Kant endorses more or less the range of ethical concern for non-human animals that more traditional utilitarians allowed” (“Kant on Duties Regarding Nonrational Nature,” Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society for the Systematic Study of Philosophy, supplement 72 [1998]: 211–28 [p. 223]). Margit Livingston notes that, because of the violence graduation hypothesis, the anthropocentric approach justifies the same kinds of legal protections that an appeal to animal rights would: “One need not believe that animals have a ‘right’ to be free from torture and neglect to promote legal reforms directed at reducing the overall incidence of animal abuse. In identifying and treating young abusers especially, society arguably diminishes the likelihood that such abusers will progress to violent acts against humans” (“Desecrating the Ark: Animal Abuse and the Law’s Role in Prevention,” Iowa Law Review 87, no. 1 [Oct. 2001]: 1–73 [p. 42]).


Christie v. Bergh, 15 Abb. Pr. (n.s.) 51 (N.Y. 1873). A similar thought is expressed in a Mississippi case: “Cruelty to [animals] manifests a vicious and degraded nature, and it tends inevitably to cruelty to men. . . . Human beings should be kind and just to dumb brutes, if for no other reason than to learn how to be kind and just to each other” (Stephens v. State, 3 So. 458–9 [Miss. 1887]). Both cases echo Kant’s reasoning, especially at LE 459.

Livingston, “Desecrating the Ark,” 21, 72.

The FBI, for example, includes a history of animal abuse in its profile of the typical serial killer or serial rapist. See Randall Lockwood and Ann Church, “Deadly Serious: An FBI Perspective on Animal Cruelty,” in Cruelty to Animals and Interpersonal Violence. In 1987, the American Psychiatric Association added physical cruelty to animals as one of the diagnostic criteria for conduct disorder (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 3rd rev. edn. [Washington, D.C.: American Psychiatric Association, 1987], 55).

Frank R. Ascione, “Battered Women’s Reports of Their Partners’ and Their Children’s Cruelty to Animals,” Journal of Emotional Abuse 1, no. 1 (July
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