

Christina Hoff, "Kant's Invidious Humanism,"
Environmental Ethics 5 (Spring, 1983): 63-70

Kant's position on animals has been ably treated in the recent past.¹ Unfortunately, Hoff does not cite these treatments, and spends much of her time repeating what has gone on before: for Kant we have no direct duties to animals since they are not

rational or self-conscious or capable of moral legislation; animals are therefore means only or things, and although it is useful for us to act *as if* we have duties to animals, this is only a sign of respect for humanity, since being cruel to animals makes us more

inclined to be cruel to human beings. As Broadie and Pybus put it: "Having ceremoniously ushered animals out of the front door of the moral universe, Kant has, with commendable discretion, tried to smuggle them in again through the back."² Broadie and Pybus have also previously alerted us to the fact that this Kantian view is evidenced in the *Lectures on Ethics*, the *Groundwork*, and (unmentioned by Hoff) the *Metaphysics of Morals*. And Broadie, Pybus, and Regan have previously criticized Kant's position on animals, as does Hoff.

What does Hoff tell us that is new? She makes much of the fact that the first formulation of the categorical imperative makes no mention of a moral domain. Only in the second formulation, which she calls the "humanistic imperative," is the community of moral subjects limited to rational beings. Hoff implies, but does not state, that Kant *could* have had an ethics of universalizability without being a speciesist, but it is by no means clear that this is her view. At one point (p. 68) she implies that she is an intuitionist when she states regarding Kant's humanism that "In the absence of good arguments in favor of a dogmatic and exclusive humanism, we may trust our moral intuitions." The "common moral intuition" she refers to is that suffering is an evil, and it is wrong to gratuitously and deliberately inflict it on animals (p. 67). This is fine as far as it goes, but one wishes that Hoff would have treated equally common intuitions regarding animals, and perhaps conflicting ones, e.g., that meat-eating is legitimate.

In addition to concentrating on the differences between the first and second formulations of the categorical imperative, Hoff contributes to our understanding of Kant's position on animals in her treatment of "the patient-agent parity thesis" (p. 69),

which suggests that the domain of moral agents coincides with that of moral patients. Kant holds this thesis regarding animals. But if he abandoned it regarding the mentally enfeebled, which seems likely, then he would be inconsistent since the mentally enfeebled are not rational, self-conscious, or moral legislators. That is, Kant could have learned a great deal from what is now commonly called the argument from marginal cases.³ Hoff concludes that the patient-agent parity thesis must be rejected because the domain of moral patients is much larger than that of moral agents.

Much more work needs to be done on the relationship between Kant and Kantianism, on the one hand, and speciesism, on the other. This is why I have emphasized Hoff's redundancy. Charles Hartshorne gives us some clues as to what might still be done in this area.⁴ The rationality that Kant takes to be the precondition of value is not the absolute thing in human beings that he takes it to be. If there is an absolute quality of rationality that a higher animal lacks, then a human being lacks it as well. Kant says⁵ that only a rational will that acts according to its rationality is intrinsically or unqualifiedly good. But he also admits that human beings so act only imperfectly or incompletely. Only God always and entirely conforms to rational requirements. From this point of view no animal, not even a human being, is really an end in itself. In the sense in which *any* animal has intrinsic value, for Hartshorne, *all* animals have some of it, and the differences are matters of degree. The really significant difference, as Hartshorne sees it, is between *any* animal and the Everlasting.

That is, although Hoff's treatment of intrinsic value in animals is well done, more thought has to be given to the extent of Kant's invidious

humanism: it causes him not only to treat unfavorably any beings

"beneath" human beings, but also any possible being above human beings.

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NOTES

¹ Alexander Broadie and Elizabeth M. Pybus, "Kant's Treatment of Animals," *Philosophy* 49 (Oct., 1974): 375-383; Tom Regan, "Broadie and Pybus on Kant," *Philosophy* 51 (Oct., 1976): 471-472; and Elizabeth M. Pybus and Alexander Broadie, "Kant and the Maltreatment of Animals," *Philosophy* 53 (Oct., 1978): 560-561.

² Alexander Broadie and Elizabeth M. Pybus, "Kant's Treatment of Animals," p. 383.

³ This argument can be found, among other places, in Tom Regan, "Fox's Critique of Animal Liberation," *Ethics* 88 (Jan., 1978): 126-133. To the possible objection that this argument was beyond anything that Kant could have thought of in the eighteenth century, it should be noted that the argument was discovered in antiquity. See my "Vegetarianism and the Argument from Marginal Cases in Porphyry," to appear in 1984 in the *Journal of the History of Ideas*.

⁴ See "Foundations for a Humane Ethics: What Human Beings Have in Common with Other Higher Animals," in *On the Fifth Day: Animal Rights and Human Ethics*, ed. by Richard Knowles Morris (Wash., D.C.: Acropolis Press, 1978), pp. 170-171; "The Rights of the Subhuman World," *Environmental Ethics* 1 (1979), pp. 50-51; and "The Environmental Results of Technology," in *Philosophy and Environmental Crisis*, ed. by William T. Blackstone (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 1974), p. 72.

⁵ *Lectures on Ethics*, trans. by Louis Infield (N.Y.: Harper and Row, 1963), pp. 239-240. Kant's view that we do not have direct duties to animals, only indirect ones, is not solely due to his rationalism, as Hoff implies. It may also be due to Christian influences on him; St. Thomas Aquinas held a similar view. See *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Third Book, Part II, Chapter CXII.