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## **Reimagining Kantian Ethics: Expanding Moral Consideration to Non-Rational Nature and Animal in Environmental Ethics**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This paper critically examines the capacity of Immanuel Kant's ethical framework to incorporate moral concern for non-rational nature, with a particular focus on non-rational animals. Through an analysis of four contemporary Kantian scholars—Lara Denis, Onora O'Neill, Allen Wood, and Christine Korsgaard—the study explores how Kantian ethics might be reinterpreted to address the moral status of non-rational beings. The analysis is structured into two main sections. The first investigates Denis and O'Neill's indirect duty approach, which grounds human obligations to animals in the pursuit of moral self-perfection. While their revisions offer a pathway for moral consideration of animals, I argue that their accounts struggle to reconcile Kant's rigid distinction between rational humans and non-rational animals, risking the dilution of core Kantian principles. The second section evaluates Wood and Korsgaard's more radical proposals, which advocate for direct moral duties toward non-rational nature. Wood posits that animals possess traces of rationality, warranting respect, while Korsgaard grounds obligations in the natural goods of animals, emphasizing their capacity to experience what is naturally good or bad. However, I contend that both approaches risk departing from Kant's insistence on rationality as the sole foundation for intrinsic moral worth. Among the four perspectives, O'Neill's indirect duty approach emerges as the most promising, as it remains closest to Kant's original framework. Nevertheless, I highlight its limitations, particularly its lack of precision in explaining how concern for non-rational animals contributes to moral self-perfection. Building on O'Neill's insights, I propose an extension of Kant's *Kingdom of Ends* formula, which recognizes the natural goods of non-rational beings without attributing moral agency to them. This framework establishes human obligations to promote the well-being of non-rational nature while preserving Kant's emphasis on rationality as the basis for moral valuation. This paper underscores the challenges of integrating non-rational beings into Kant's ethical system while offering a refined approach that balances Kantian principles with contemporary moral concerns.

**Keywords:** Kantian Ethics; Non-Rational Nature; Indirect Duty Theory; Environmental Ethics.

## INTRODUCTION

Immanuel Kant's moral philosophy has long been a cornerstone of ethical theory, particularly for its emphasis on rationality, autonomy, and the categorical imperative. However, one of the most persistent criticisms of Kantian ethics is its perceived inability to adequately address the moral status of non-rational beings, such as animals and the broader natural world. Kant's framework is often interpreted as relegating non-rational nature to a position of instrumental value, with moral consideration extended only indirectly through their impact on rational beings. This limitation has led many environmental ethicists to dismiss Kantianism as inherently anthropocentric and ill-suited to addressing contemporary ecological concerns.

Yet, in recent decades, a growing number of Kantian scholars have sought to challenge this interpretation, arguing that Kant's philosophy contains untapped resources for grounding moral concern for non-rational nature. These scholars contend that, with careful reinterpretation and development, Kantian ethics can provide a robust framework for addressing the moral status of animals and the environment. This paper critically examines the works of four prominent contemporary Kantians—Lara Denis, Onora O'Neill, Allen Wood, and Christine Korsgaard—who have undertaken this task. Each of these thinkers offers a distinct approach to reconciling Kantian ethics with the moral consideration of non-rational beings, ranging from revised versions of indirect duty theory to proposals for direct moral duties.

The paper is structured into two main sections. The first section focuses on the contributions of Denis and O'Neill, who defend and refine Kant's indirect duty theory. O'Neill argues that human moral perfection entails indirect obligations toward non-rational animals, as our treatment of them reflects and shapes our moral character. Denis, on the other hand, emphasizes the role of morally useful sentiments in shaping our duties toward animals, suggesting that Kant's framework imposes more extensive restrictions on human-animal relations than is commonly assumed. Both scholars seek to expand the scope of Kantian ethics while remaining within the bounds of indirect duty theory.

The second section shifts to the more radical proposals of Wood and Korsgaard, who argue for direct moral duties toward non-rational nature. Wood posits that non-rational beings deserve direct moral consideration if they exhibit fragments or preconditions of rationality, thereby warranting respect akin to that accorded to rational beings. Korsgaard, meanwhile, grounds her argument in the shared animal nature of humans and non-rational animals, asserting that since humans intrinsically value their own animal nature, they must extend similar moral consideration to other animals. Both Wood and Korsgaard challenge the traditional Kantian dichotomy between rational and non-rational beings, offering innovative ways to integrate non-rational nature into Kantian ethics.

While these accounts represent significant advancements in Kantian environmental ethics, they are not without their limitations. This paper critically evaluates the strengths and weaknesses of each approach, identifying unresolved challenges and areas for further development. By engaging with these contemporary reinterpretations of Kant's philosophy, the paper aims to contribute to the broader discourse on environmental ethics and explore the potential for a Kantian approach to address the moral status of non-rational nature. Ultimately, this analysis seeks to clarify the advantages of a Kantian framework for environmental ethics while acknowledging the obstacles that must be addressed to make it a viable alternative to other ethical theories.

## **SAVING KANT'S INDIRECT-DUTY THEORY**

Kant's moral philosophy posits that duties concerning non-rational beings are indirect and serve primarily as a means to fulfill human ends. According to Kant, non-rational beings, such as animals, do not possess intrinsic moral worth because they lack rational nature, which is the foundation of moral consideration in his framework (Ogar & Bassey, 2023). Consequently, non-rational beings are not entitled to direct moral consideration. However, Kant argues that humans should refrain from mistreating non-rational beings because such behavior could lead to the mistreatment of other humans.

In other words, Kant's theory establishes that only humans are owed direct moral duties, while non-rational beings are granted only indirect moral consideration. These indirect duties arise because actions toward non-rational beings may have implications for human moral life. For instance, cruelty toward animals might desensitize individuals to cruelty toward other humans, thereby undermining moral character (Kant, 1997). Thus, non-rational beings hold mere instrumental value, serving human needs and purposes. This instrumentalist view has drawn significant criticism from environmental ethicists and animal rights advocates, who argue that Kant's theory is inadequate for addressing contemporary environmental challenges and the moral status of non-rational animals (Regan, 1983; Taylor, 1986). Despite these criticisms, some Kantian scholars have sought to defend and revise Kant's indirect-duty theory, offering nuanced interpretations that address its limitations while preserving its core principles.

### **Onora O'Neill on Kant and Non-Rational Animals**

In her seminal work, *Necessary Anthropocentrism and Contingent Speciesism*, Onora O'Neill (1998) explores Kant's moral philosophy and its implications for non-rational beings. She argues that Kant's theory is fundamentally anthropocentric, as it grants moral consideration exclusively to rational beings—namely, humans. For Kant, rationality is the defining feature that endows humans with intrinsic moral worth, making them the only beings deserving of direct moral respect. However, O'Neill contends that Kant's framework does not entirely exclude non-rational beings from moral concern. While non-rational beings lack the capacity for rationality, they are not entirely outside the moral domain. O'Neill explains that Kant's emphasis on rational natures presupposes that humans lead interconnected lives and share a common world. As she states, "Rational natures are not only agents but are on the receiving end of one another's actions. This presupposition is not self-evident: it holds only if rational natures lead connected lives, or (as Kant often puts it) 'share a world'" (O'Neill, 1998, p. 218). This interconnectedness implies that human actions toward non-rational beings can have moral significance, even if such beings lack intrinsic moral standing.

Kant's logocentric position, which prioritizes rational beings, has been criticized for its inability to sanction rights for non-rational beings, a point emphasized by many animal and environmental ethicists (Taylor, 1986; Regan, 1983). However, O'Neill argues that Kant's theory is less speciesist than it initially appears. She suggests that Kant's framework allows for the consideration of non-rational beings' well-being, albeit indirectly. For instance, Kant's indirect-duty theory maintains that humans have obligations to treat animals humanely, not because animals have intrinsic rights, but because cruelty toward animals may corrupt human moral character (O'Neill, 1998). This approach, while anthropocentric, provides a basis for extending moral concern to non-rational beings.

O'Neill further contends that Kant's theory does not endorse a simplistic form of human chauvinism. While it does not grant direct rights or obligations to non-rational beings, it acknowledges that human actions toward such beings have moral implications. Critics of speciesism may find this insufficient, as it denies moral agency and intrinsic

rights to non-rational beings. However, O'Neill argues that the notion of granting rights to beings without corresponding obligations is philosophically untenable. She asserts that Kant's indirect-duty theory offers a more coherent framework for addressing the moral status of non-rational beings than alternative approaches that rely on analogies to human rights (O'Neill, 1998).

### **Challenges to Kant's Indirect-Duty Theory**

Despite its merits, Kant's indirect-duty theory faces significant challenges, particularly from advocates of animal rights and environmental ethics. Critics argue that non-rational beings, such as animals, deserve direct moral consideration based on their capacity for sentience or their intrinsic value (Singer, 1975; Taylor, 1986). Proponents of animal rights often appeal to the similarities between humans and non-rational animals, such as the capacity to experience pain and suffering, to argue for their inclusion in the moral sphere. However, O'Neill critiques this approach, noting that arguments based on similarity often fail to account for the vast differences between humans and non-rational beings. For instance, while animals may share certain traits with humans, such as sentience, they lack the capacity for rationality, moral agency, and cultural interaction, which are central to Kant's moral framework (O'Neill, 1998).

O'Neill also highlights the limitations of non-Kantian approaches that emphasize the rights of non-rational beings (Camenzind, 2021). She argues that such approaches often rely on individualistic frameworks that are ill-suited to addressing broader environmental concerns. In contrast, Kant's indirect-duty theory provides a more holistic perspective, emphasizing the interconnectedness of human and non-rational beings within a shared world. This perspective, O'Neill suggests, offers compelling reasons for preserving the natural world, including individual animals and ecosystems. She contends that Kant's theory aligns with the principles of environmental ethics, as it underscores the importance of maintaining a healthy and sustainable environment for both humans and non-rational beings (O'Neill, 1998).

### **Environmental Implications of Kant's Theory**

O'Neill argues that Kant's indirect-duty theory has significant implications for environmental ethics. Human beings have a moral obligation to protect and preserve the natural world, not only for their own well-being but also for the sake of future generations. A healthy environment is essential for fulfilling both direct and indirect moral duties. For instance, pollution, deforestation, and habitat destruction pose risks to human health and happiness, as well as to the well-being of non-rational beings. By maintaining clean water, fertile land, and sustainable habitats, humans can fulfill their moral obligations to promote the happiness and flourishing of all beings (O'Neill, 1998). In this way, Kant's theory provides a robust foundation for environmental ethics, emphasizing the interconnectedness of human and non-rational beings within a shared moral framework.

### **LARA DENIS ON KANT AND NON-RATIONAL ANIMALS**

In her paper, *Kant's Conception of Duties Regarding Animals: Reconstruction and Reconsideration*, Lara Denis (2000) offers a detailed analysis of Kant's indirect-duty theory as it pertains to human obligations toward non-rational beings. Denis seeks to demonstrate that Kant's account of duties toward animals is more substantive and nuanced than many philosophers have acknowledged. She argues that humans have indirect duties toward animals, which are grounded in analogies between human and non-human actions and emotions, such as love, sympathy, gratitude, and malice. Denis explains that cruelty toward animals is prohibited not only because it violates a duty to

oneself but also because it contradicts the duty of love. She writes, “Cruelty for its own sake is prohibited as a violation of a duty to oneself as well as a vice contrary to a duty of love. Making an effort to be kind and to show appreciation for service fosters love, sympathy, and gratitude and so fulfills one’s duties of love and one’s duty to promote one’s own perfection. Cruel or violent treatment that is not part of a maxim that shows respect for rational nature violates a perfect duty to oneself” (Denis, 2000). This passage underscores the moral significance of treating animals with kindness and respect, as such actions contribute to the cultivation of virtuous dispositions and moral perfection.

Denis begins her analysis by emphasizing the role of emotions in moral life. She argues that certain emotional predispositions, such as sympathy and gratitude, are essential for demonstrating ethical commitments to both humans and animals. For instance, sympathy motivates individuals to act morally, even in situations where their moral resolve might otherwise be weak. Denis also highlights the similarities between humans and animals, noting that both share a common animal nature, which includes instincts for self-preservation, procreation, and social interaction. These shared traits provide a basis for extending moral consideration to animals, even if they lack rationality. Denis further contends that the way humans treat animals reflects their moral character and emotional dispositions. Treating animals with kindness and compassion fosters virtues such as love and benevolence, while cruelty toward animals undermines these virtues and violates one’s duty to oneself (Denis, 2000).

### **Imperfect Duties and Moral Perfection**

Denis argues that Kant’s account of duties toward animals can be understood as imperfect duties to oneself and others. These duties include beneficence, sympathy, and gratitude, which are essential for cultivating moral virtues and promoting moral perfection. By fulfilling these duties, individuals develop a natural disposition to act in accordance with reason, thereby enhancing their moral character. Denis explains that the duty to perfect oneself involves cultivating abilities and dispositions that align with rational nature, rather than living a life dominated by animalistic impulses. She writes, “Fulfillment of these desires or ambitions leads one to fulfill one’s imperfect duties toward oneself as well as toward others” (Denis, 2000, p. 406). In this way, indirect duties toward animals contribute to the development of virtues such as benevolence, sympathy, and gratitude, which are essential for moral perfection.

Denis also addresses Kant’s notion of self-mutilation as a framework for understanding duties toward animals. In Kant’s *Metaphysics of Morals*, self-mutilation is generally prohibited as a violation of one’s duty to oneself, except in cases where it is necessary to save a life. Denis applies this reasoning to the treatment of animals, arguing that certain actions toward animals may be *prima facie* wrong but can be justified if they serve a greater moral purpose. She states, “We should not be willing to diminish or thwart our dispositions to love and sympathy for trivial benefits.... we should not conclude that all acts that seem cruel at first glance are cruel on balance, or that all acts that are cruel on balance are wrong” (Denis, 2000, p. 414). For example, Kant permits animal experimentation if it serves a legitimate purpose, such as advancing medical knowledge, but condemns unnecessary cruelty, such as torturing animals for mere speculation. Denis argues that Kant’s indirect-duty theory provides a framework for evaluating the moral permissibility of actions toward animals, balancing the need to avoid cruelty with the potential benefits to humanity.

### **Limitations of Denis’s Interpretation**

While Denis’s interpretation of Kant’s indirect-duty theory offers valuable insights, it is not without limitations. One significant critique is that her account does not fully address

the ethical implications of using animals for human purposes, such as food production. Emer O'Hagan (2009) argues that Denis's interpretation cannot support ethical vegetarianism as it is commonly understood. O'Hagan notes, "Typically, ethical vegetarians choose not to eat meat because they care about the conditions under which animals live and die, not to avoid damaging their moral character" (O'Hagan, 2009, p. 541). This critique highlights a key limitation of Denis's account: while it emphasizes the importance of treating animals with kindness and respect, it does not provide a robust justification for prioritizing animal welfare over human interests.

Another limitation of Denis's interpretation is its reliance on the concept of self-mutilation to justify certain actions toward animals. While this framework provides a useful analogy, it does not fully address the moral complexities of human-animal interactions. For instance, Skidmore (2001) argues that excessive sympathy for animals can distract individuals from their moral duties toward other humans. He contends that individuals must balance their sympathy for animals with a clear understanding of the moral differences between humans and non-rational beings. This critique suggests that Denis's account may not provide a sufficient basis for resolving conflicts between human and animal interests.

### **PROBLEMS WITH ONORA O'NEILL AND LARA DENIS**

Both Onora O'Neill and Lara Denis offer compelling interpretations of Kant's indirect-duty theory, but their accounts are not without shortcomings. O'Neill's defense of Kant's theory emphasizes the interconnectedness of human and non-rational beings, arguing that humans have indirect duties toward nature because their actions affect both themselves and the environment. However, her account does not fully explain how concern for non-rational nature contributes to human moral perfection. This lack of detail limits the practical applicability of her interpretation, particularly in addressing contemporary environmental challenges.

Similarly, Denis's interpretation of Kant's indirect-duty theory provides a nuanced understanding of human obligations toward animals, but it fails to address the ethical implications of using animals for human purposes. Her account also relies heavily on analogies to human moral duties, which may not fully capture the unique moral status of animals. These limitations highlight the need for further development of Kantian ethics to address the complex moral issues surrounding human-animal interactions and environmental ethics.

### **A KANTIAN ACCOUNT OF DIRECT DUTY TOWARD NON-RATIONAL NATURE**

Kant's moral philosophy traditionally posits that human beings have no direct obligations toward non-rational animals because animals lack autonomy and rationality, which are the foundational criteria for moral consideration. Instead, Kant argues that humans should refrain from cruelty toward animals because such behavior may lead to cruelty toward other humans. This indirect-duty theory has been criticized by environmental ethicists and animal rights advocates, who argue that it fails to adequately address the moral status of non-rational beings. For instance, Tom Regan (1983) contends that non-rational animals, like humans, are subjects of a life and thus deserve moral consideration. Similarly, Peter Singer (1975) argues that sentient animals, capable of experiencing pleasure and pain, possess inherent value and should be included in the moral sphere. In response to these criticisms, some Kantian scholars have sought to reinterpret and expand Kant's indirect-duty theory to provide a more robust account of the moral status of non-rational beings. They argue that Kant's ethics, if revised and

adapted, can offer a compelling framework for addressing the moral consideration of non-rational nature.

### **Allen Wood on Kant and Non-Rational Animals**

In his paper, *Kant on Duties Regarding Non-Rational Nature*, Allen Wood (1998) critiques Kant's logocentric approach, which prioritizes rational beings and relegates non-rational beings to instrumental status. Wood argues that Kant's theory, as traditionally interpreted, leads to the exploitation of non-rational beings because it denies them intrinsic moral value. According to Kant, only rational beings possess incomparable worth and dignity, as they are capable of acting according to principles and laws. Non-rational beings, by contrast, are governed solely by natural laws and lack the capacity for rational agency. Consequently, Kant asserts that humans have no direct duties toward non-rational beings; any duties concerning animals are indirect and derive from their impact on human moral character.

Wood challenges Kant's indirect-duty theory by highlighting its counterintuitive implications. He argues that if human psychology were such that cruelty toward animals fostered kindness toward humans, Kant's framework would paradoxically obligate individuals to inflict gratuitous suffering on animals. Wood writes, "If it happened to be a quirk of human psychology that torturing animals would make us that much kinder toward humans... 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" (Wood, 1998, pp. 194–195). This critique underscores the limitations of Kant's indirect-duty theory and calls for a more nuanced approach to the moral consideration of non-rational beings.

### **Rejecting the Personification Principle**

Wood proposes an alternative strategy to reconcile Kant's logocentric ethics with the moral status of non-rational beings. He rejects what he terms the "personification principle," which holds that rationality can only be respected in fellow human beings. According to this principle, all moral obligations are duties to persons, and non-rational beings, lacking rationality, cannot be the objects of direct moral duties. Wood argues that this principle is overly restrictive and incompatible with a broader understanding of moral concern. He asserts that Kantians must abandon the personification principle to extend moral consideration to non-rational beings.

Wood suggests that rational nature should be respected not only in persons but also in its abstract form, including fragments or necessary conditions of rationality found in non-rational beings. He writes, "We must also regard 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" (Wood, 1998, p. 198). For example, many non-human animals possess desires and the capacity to experience pleasure and pain, which are foundational aspects of rational nature. Wood argues that to frustrate an animal's desires or cause it unnecessary suffering is to disrespect the shared elements of rational nature that animals possess. He states, "For although nonhuman animals may not possess rational nature itself, they do possess recognizable fragments of it. They have capacities which we should value as the infrastructure, so to speak, of rational nature" (Wood, 1998, p. 200).

### **Extending Moral Consideration to Non-Rational Beings**

Wood does not claim that non-rational beings are ends in themselves but insists that they deserve respect due to their connection to rational nature. He emphasizes that Kant's logocentric ethics can be reinterpreted to include respect for the "natural teleology" of

human-animal nature. For instance, Kant's prohibition of suicide and intemperance reflects a respect for human beings as rational individuals with animal natures. Wood argues that this principle can be extended to non-rational beings, as they share certain capacities and characteristics with humans. He writes, "The point I am making is easiest to see and hardest to deny, in the case of many human beings... who lack 'humanity'... and therefore must fail... to be persons at all. They include small children and people who have severe mental impairments or diseases... Clearly Kant would not want to say that such human beings are mere things, which are to be treated only as means" (Wood, 1998, p. 200). Wood's reinterpretation of Kant's ethics thus provides a basis for extending moral consideration to non-rational beings while remaining consistent with Kantian principles.

### **Implications for Environmental Ethics**

Wood's revised Kantian framework has significant implications for environmental ethics. By rejecting the personification principle and emphasizing respect for the fragments of rational nature in non-rational beings, Wood provides a philosophical basis for addressing the moral status of animals and other non-rational entities. His approach challenges the traditional anthropocentric view of Kantian ethics and offers a more inclusive account of moral concern. However, Wood's interpretation also raises questions about the scope and limits of moral consideration. For instance, while he advocates for respect toward non-rational beings, he does not grant them the same intrinsic value as rational beings. This distinction highlights the ongoing tension between anthropocentric and biocentric approaches in environmental ethics.

### **CHRISTINE KORSGAARD ON KANT AND NON-RATIONAL BEINGS**

Christine Korsgaard seeks to extend Kant's moral philosophy to justify direct obligations toward non-rational beings, particularly animals (Muller, 2022). In her article *Fellow Creatures: Kantian Ethics and Our Duties to Animals*, Korsgaard (2004) argues that Kant's concept of an "end in itself" can be interpreted to include animals, thereby granting them direct moral consideration. While Kant traditionally restricts the status of being an "end in itself" to rational beings—humans who possess autonomy and the capacity for normative self-government—Korsgaard contends that this framework can be expanded to encompass non-rational beings. She explains Kant's notion of rationality as follows: "Rationality, for Kant, 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. Rationality also makes it necessary for us to exercise this capacity, for as long as we are conscious of our principles, to some extent we cannot help but assess them" (Korsgaard, 2004, p. 87). This capacity for rationality is what distinguishes humans as ends in themselves, according to Kant.

However, Korsgaard challenges the traditional Kantian view that non-rational beings, such as animals, are excluded from direct moral consideration (Fyfe, 2023). She argues that while non-rational beings cannot participate in moral interactions or fulfill moral obligations, this does not absolve humans of duties toward them. Korsgaard draws parallels between non-rational animals and certain categories of humans, such as infants, the severely cognitively impaired, and the elderly, who may lack full rational capacity at certain stages of life. She notes that Kant's framework does not deny moral consideration to these individuals, despite their temporary or permanent lack of rationality. Similarly, Korsgaard asserts that non-rational animals, though lacking the capacity for normative self-government, deserve moral consideration based on their shared nature with humans as beings who pursue their own good.



### **The Natural Good of Non-Rational Beings**

Korsgaard grounds her argument in the concept of the “natural good” of non-rational beings. She explains that animals, like humans, are organic systems that pursue their own good and experience what is naturally beneficial or harmful to them. She writes, “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” (Korsgaard, 2004, pp. 102–103). This pursuit of natural good, Korsgaard argues, establishes a basis for moral consideration, as animals, like humans, have interests and goals that are intrinsically valuable.

Korsgaard further compares non-rational animals to what Kant refers to as “passive citizens” in his political philosophy. Passive citizens, such as women, children, apprentices, and domestic servants, are granted rights and protections under the law, even though they lack the capacity to participate fully in legislative processes. Similarly, Korsgaard argues that non-rational beings, while incapable of self-legislation, deserve moral recognition and respect from those who possess rational agency. She writes, “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-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” (Korsgaard, 2004, p. 106). This legislative act, Korsgaard contends, extends moral consideration to non-rational beings by recognizing their natural good as a source of normative claims.

### **Extending Moral Consideration to Plants**

Korsgaard also considers the moral status of plants, arguing that they, too, have a natural good that distinguishes them from inanimate objects. While plants lack the capacity for desire or enjoyment, they possess needs and pursue their own good through processes such as growth and self-maintenance. Korsgaard notes, “Plants also have their goods, although their goods are something slightly different from non-rational animals... Plants have their own needs, the need to maintain themselves, and it is in this sense that we can say that plants pursue their own good, unlike or in contrast to cars or stones, which cannot” (Korsgaard, 2004, p. 118). This distinction highlights the continuity between humans, animals, and plants as beings with natural goods, while acknowledging the differences in their capacities for pursuing those goods.

### **The Formula of Humanity and Non-Rational Beings**

Korsgaard connects her argument to Kant’s Formula of Humanity, which states that rational beings must be treated as ends in themselves and never merely as means. She suggests that this formulation can be extended to include the natural good of non-rational beings. While humans confer intrinsic value on themselves and others through their rational nature, they also value their animal nature, which they share with non-rational beings. Korsgaard writes, “While enabling the key requirement of the self-conferring worth would be the legislative will, which is a component of one’s independent nature, the objectives to be set involve one’s rational nature as well as animal nature. It, therefore, offers the foundation for the recognition of obligations towards non-rational animals” (Korsgaard, 2004, p. 118). By recognizing the natural good of non-rational beings, humans establish a basis for moral obligations toward them.

Korsgaard’s reinterpretation of Kantian ethics provides a compelling framework for extending moral consideration to non-rational beings. By emphasizing the shared

natural good of humans and animals, she challenges the traditional anthropocentric view of Kant's philosophy and offers a more inclusive account of moral obligations. Her argument not only justifies direct duties toward animals but also raises important questions about the moral status of other living beings, such as plants. Korsgaard's work represents a significant contribution to the ongoing dialogue between Kantian ethics and environmental philosophy, demonstrating the potential for Kant's framework to address contemporary ethical challenges.

## CONCLUSION

In this paper, I have critically examined four prominent Kantian approaches that seek to reinterpret Kant's ethics to account for the moral standing of non-rational beings. While these interpretations are innovative and hold promise, they each face significant challenges that require further scrutiny. Onora O'Neill and Lara Denis advocate for an indirect duty approach, arguing that human obligations toward non-rational animals are grounded in their contribution to moral self-perfection. However, I have demonstrated that O'Neill's account lacks a detailed explanation of how concern for non-rational animals directly contributes to moral perfection, while Denis's extension of Kant's indirect duty theory fails to adequately address the categorical distinction Kant draws between rational humans and non-rational animals. Both approaches, when pressed to their logical conclusions, risk diluting the core tenets of Kantian ethics.

In contrast, Allen Wood and Christine Korsgaard propose direct duty accounts, arguing that Kant's framework can accommodate moral concern for non-rational beings. Wood suggests that animals possess traces of rationality, which warrant respect, but I have argued that this interpretation overlooks Kant's insistence on rationality and autonomy as prerequisites for intrinsic worth. Korsgaard, on the other hand, grounds direct obligations in the natural goods of non-rational animals, asserting that their capacity to experience what is naturally good or bad imposes moral duties on humans. However, I have contended that her approach diverges significantly from Kant's emphasis on rationality as the sole basis for intrinsic value, as articulated in the Formula of Humanity.

Among the four approaches, O'Neill's indirect duty account emerges as the most promising, as it remains closest to Kant's original framework. Nevertheless, I have highlighted that her argument lacks precision in explaining how concern for non-rational animals contributes to moral self-perfection. Building on O'Neill's insights, I have argued that Kant's concept of moral perfection provides a robust foundation for ethical consideration of non-rational beings. By extending the Kingdom of Ends formula, I have proposed an account in which non-rational beings, while lacking moral agency, possess natural goods that distinguish them from mere objects. This framework establishes moral obligations for humans to promote the natural goods of non-rational nature, even as they remain outside the realm of moral valuation.

Ultimately, this paper underscores the complexities of reconciling Kantian ethics with the moral standing of non-rational beings. While the examined approaches offer valuable insights, they also reveal the need for further refinement to remain consistent with Kant's core principles. By engaging with these interpretations, this study contributes to the ongoing discourse on the ethical treatment of non-rational beings within a Kantian framework, offering a pathway for future research to explore the intersection of moral philosophy, environmental ethics, and animal welfare.

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