



Universität
Basel

Research Project

Respect for Foxes and Hedgehogs: Animal Agency and Kantian Ethics of Respect

Third-party funded project

Project title Respect for Foxes and Hedgehogs: Animal Agency and Kantian Ethics of Respect

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Organisation / Research unit

Departement Künste, Medien, Philosophie / Theoretische Philosophie (Wild)

Department

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Status Completed

The project: Kant's moral philosophy is a predominant paradigm in contemporary ethics. However, one thing modern readers of Kant are often unimpressed with is his account of animal ethics. The question this dissertation attempts to answer is: What if we took Kant's moral philosophy and modified it so that it can account for respect for nonhuman animals? In answering this question, I provide an in-depth account of the relation between Kant's views about what animals are and his views about how we ought to treat them. By bringing together Kant's philosophy with the newest advances in the philosophy of animal minds and animal agency, I then provide a new framework for animal ethics which I call the Ethics of Respect. Realisation: The project answers its central question in two steps spanning three semesters each: First, it corrects Kant's rather crude views about what animals are and what their capabilities are. In Kant's view, animals lack practical reason and are steered wholly by behavioral automatisms - a view I criticize and replace with a pluralist view of animal practical capabilities. Secondly, the project accordingly corrects Kant's views on how we morally ought to treat animals. In the course of taking the second step, the project outlines the moral philosophy Kant should have defended had he not been oblivious to the extent and diversity of animal practical capabilities - the Ethics of Respect. This is effectively a Kantian system of ethics equipped with tools from the philosophy of animal minds and animal agency to deal with moral questions relating to animals. Its heart is a Categorical Imperative that is sensitive to the differences in practical capabilities we find in the animal world. Finally, the project spells out the implications of this renewed Categorical Imperative for our moral practice.

Keywords Animal minds; Animal agency; Animal ethics; Kant; Respect; Animal Rights

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