

## REGARDING ANIMALS: KANT'S ACCOUNT OF SELF-DECEPTION AND ITS RELEVANCE TO ANIMAL WELFARE ADVOCACY

[SOBRE OS ANIMAIS: A VISÃO DA KANT SOBRE O AUTO-ENGANO E SUA RELEVÂNCIA PARA A DEFESA DO BEM-ESTAR ANIMAL]

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**ABSTRACT:** In recent decades, the deconstruction of the anthropocentric paradigm has placed issues such as animal exploitation at the heart of modern ethical and meta-ethical debates. This topic has also been the focus of attention within Kantianism. In light of the fundamental differences between humans and animals and the impossibility of assigning direct duties to animals posed by Kant's theory, making his practical philosophy useful for the defense of animal welfare seems an impossible task, other things being equal. Added to this difficulty is the criticism that a theory based on universal principles and individual duties may be inadequate to deal with animal welfare under cultural and situational considerations. By addressing these challenges, I aim to show that Kant's practical philosophy provides valuable resources for animal welfare advocacy. In this spirit, I contend that, though limited, Kant's account of self-deception is a promising way to bridge animal welfare alongside the ethos of Kant's moral theory.

**KEYWORDS:** Kant's ethics; animal welfare; self-deception; moral psychology.

**RESUMO:** Nas últimas décadas, a desconstrução do paradigma antropocêntrico colocou questões como a exploração animal no centro dos debates éticos e meta-éticos modernos. Este tema tem sido o foco de atenção também no âmbito dos estudos Kantianos. À luz das diferenças fundamentais entre seres humanos e animais e da impossibilidade posta pela teoria de Kant de atribuir deveres diretos aos animais, tornar sua filosofia prática útil para a defesa do bem-estar animal parece uma tarefa impossível. A esta dificuldade soma-se a crítica de que uma teoria baseada em princípios universais e deveres individuais pode ser inadequada para lidar com o bem-estar animal sob considerações culturais e situacionais. Ao abordar estes desafios, pretendo mostrar que a filosofia prática de Kant fornece recursos valiosos para a defesa do bem-estar animal. Neste espírito, eu sustento que, embora limitado, o tratamento de Kant acerca do auto-engano é uma forma promissora de fazer a ponte entre o bem-estar animal e o ethos da sua teoria moral.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Ética Kantiana; Auto-Engano; Bem-Estar Animal; Psicologia Moral

### INTRODUCTION

In the past few decades, the deconstruction of the anthropocentric paradigm has been placing topics such as animal exploitation at the center of contemporary ethical and meta-ethical debates. Recently, human treatment of animals has started to

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receive due attention, including within Kantian studies<sup>1</sup>.

Criticisms from within as well as from outside animal welfare movements capture two aspects relevant to the moral debate on the topic. The first concerns the claim of *universality* of certain ethical theories that address animal welfare. Socially progressive groups as well as critics of animal welfare movements<sup>2</sup> are often skeptical that drawing on ethical theories whose principles claim to be universal can do any good. That is because once exploiting animals is deemed morally wrong, assessing individuals' actions as immoral may result in hostility towards those perceived as performing immoral acts. In addition, voices within animal welfare movements raise objections to overly *individualistic* ethical theories, which, in their view, place decision-making and agency models within the constraints of an individual's standpoint, thus failing to address structural social formations and to fully contemplate the social changes needed to form more egalitarian societies.

If correct, both views lend support to the view that universal normative approaches that focus on individualistic models of agency flatten cultural nuances, as they leave little or no room for social and situational particularities that mark cultural diversity. In this spirit, progressists tend to conclude that the best strategy to address animal exploitation is to avoid adopting individualistic approaches and, instead of targeting individual deeds, one should focus on global and structural changes. For instance, one should hold accountable large corporations commodifying animals, center one's attention on public policies that guarantee animal and social welfare, and so on.

As a matter of fact, overly individualistic ethical approaches can lead to a number of issues, such as those associated with moral motivation. For instance, it has been argued that the perception that individual actions are only narrowly effective may lessen individuals' motivation to undertake actions whose ends go beyond that discrete action's scope. Chignell (2020) draws on Kant's *Religion* to argue that even when one's individual efforts to curb animal exploitation may appear ineffective, reasonable hope bolsters one's psychological resolve to take actions out of duty.

Due to the narrow scope of this paper, I do not develop straightforward answers to the problems of universality or individuality in general. Like Chignell, I bring these concerns into the framework of Kant's ethics, problematizing *to what extent* an ethics that focuses on individual duties and is grounded on universal principles can address the problem of how we treat animals. Particularly, I discuss the degree to which Kant's ethics can accommodate premises that protect animals from human harm, and argue that within Kant's theoretical framework, his account of self-deception amounts to an insightful path to take for making a compelling case towards animal welfare.

In order to do so, I proceed in two stages. In the first section, I show that, because of the way Kant structures his taxonomy of duties and most importantly, because such categorization is based on a reading about fundamental differences between humans and animals, assigning *direct* duties to animals is not a possibility<sup>3</sup>. However, as I argue in the second section, this is not the same as denying that certain elements of Kant's practical philosophy can provide a valuable resource for advocating for animal welfare. In that section, I provide a brief reconstruction of the self-regarding duties to strive for moral perfection and self-knowledge to argue that the duty against self-deception has an important complementary function to the former ones. To illustrate the centrality of truthfulness in ensuring their fulfillment, I resort to empirical evidence as well as to epistemic considerations that will ultimately allow us to point out the limitations of Kant's account of self-deception and of Kant's moral theory when it comes to addressing animal welfare.

I then proceed to consider the merits of Kant's ethics and conclude by arguing

that avoiding self-deception is a fundamental step one should take in order to avoid performing actions of animal exploitation - especially when it comes to the main forms of animal abuse discussed throughout the empirical literature. I point to the idea that the criticisms regarding individualistic and universal ethics may be easily given an argumentative coating so as to be used by commonsense individuals to rationalize<sup>4</sup> their behavior. Finally, I address these criticisms by showing that, for Kant, individual and collective progress are operative and tied together within his account of moral progress.

By the end of this discussion, I will have built a balanced case for the helpfulness of Kant's ethics for animal welfare. On the one hand, Kant's account of self-deception seems a promising way to ground the defense of animal welfare from an objective point of view, since it establishes a criterion of objectivity that at the same time takes into account the theoretical framework underlying the attribution of merely indirect duties to animals. On the other hand, the duty against self-deception as such runs into inescapable epistemic limitations, which make the assignment of objectively valid duties to the institution of animal welfare especially difficult in Kant.

## SECTION I

In the Introduction to the *Metaphysics of Morals* Kant takes the first step toward systematizing his taxonomy of ethical duties by presenting the two ends one ought to adopt as duties: one's own perfection and the happiness of others (MS 6:385). These ends underlie the division of ethical duties between *duties to oneself* and *duties to others* (MS 6:386; GMS 4:421). In turn, each of these duties bifurcates into perfect and imperfect duties. Perfect duties are also called negative or limiting duties because they prohibit or comment on specific actions. Imperfect duties, on the other hand, are called positive and are wide in scope, for they command the adoption of specific ends. (MS 6:419).

Throughout his ethical writings, Kant insists on the priority of perfect over imperfect duties. Imperfect duties allow latitude for choice and are thus subordinated to perfect ones, which do not.

Meanwhile, duties to oneself are core to Kant's ethics since they may be regarded as fundamental to our use of practical reason. By looking at Kant's stance on the consequences of violating these duties, one might find it helpful to appreciate their relevance. For instance, while violating duties to others impacts an agent's worth in specific circumstances, to violate duties to oneself *completely robs* one's inner worth (VE 27:344; MS 6:404, 420).

Although one can hardly argue for the priority of duties to oneself over duties to others<sup>5</sup>, noting the centrality of these duties is crucial for at least two reasons. First, because it allows us to understand how Kant's view of animal cognition motivates his understanding of the moral status of animals and of the duties we have toward them, which will be discussed next. Second, because the centrality of duties to oneself directly entails the centrality of the duty against self-deception for cases involving animal welfare. This will be discussed in section 02.

Importantly, duties to oneself relate to the way one regards one's own worth, an idea that carries a key aspect of Kant's view on the moral status of animals. According to him, the principle underlying self-regarding duties rests on something *unique* to human beings, namely, freedom<sup>6</sup>. Although animals have the capacity for the power of choice, they lack freedom of choice, as their power of choice is determined by their sensible nature (VE, 27:344).

Moreover, although both share a sensible nature that makes them "needy beings" capable of using their power of choice to satisfy their sensible urges, only human beings are capable of elevating themselves above their own animality (KpV: 61). They are able to choose to prioritize rationality over their sensuous needs and inclinations. For instance, "someone who has a surgical operation performed on himself feels it without doubt as something bad; but through reason he and everyone declares it to be good." (KpV: 61) In other words, as human beings, we are free to manipulate our natural drives and eventually put them at the service of what is required by reason. (KU, 5:432). Action according to duty emphasizes the unique ability of human beings to value their own worth, that is, to act based on their self-regard as free rational beings.

In contrast, Kant assumes that in the absence of a rational nature, animals are driven by a comparable, but not identical principle, namely instinct. Most notably, Kant states that "[w]e can attribute to animals an analogue of reason (*analogon rationis*), which involves connection of representations according to the laws of sensibility" (VM 28: 276<sup>7</sup>). It poses an unbridgeable distinction between humans and animals, rooted in the way these two species' souls are constituted - rather than just a matter of degree (VM 28: 689 - 690; ).

Throughout his ethics, Kant emphasizes that although part of human nature encompasses animality, human beings are animals "endowed with reason" (MS 6: 456, my emphasis) as the capacity for rationality is interconnected with the capacity for morality. Accordingly, the point that interests Kant in this claim is not simply that animals do not possess reason. Instead, Kant's interest seems to lie in what follows from it. Because animals lack reason (and because moral obligation requires reason), animals cannot stand under moral obligation.

Kant's account of human predispositions deepens this gap between humans and non-human animals even further. According to him, three predispositions determine human beings: animality, humanity, and personality (REL 6: 26). The predisposition to animality concerns characteristics of our sensible nature, such as self-preservation, perpetuation of the species, and preservation of one's "capacity to enjoy life" (MS 6: 420). The predisposition to humanity, also called physical self-love, involves "the inclination to gain worth in the opinion of others" (REL 6: 27), and precisely because of this, it involves a certain (sensibly limited) use of practical reason. In contrast, the predisposition to personality is described by Kant as a condition that makes human beings susceptible to *morality*. In particular, it concerns the "susceptibility to respect for the moral law as of itself a sufficient incentive to the power of choice" which is, in turn, rooted in "practical reason of itself, i.e., in reason legislating unconditionally" (MS 6: 28).

Critically enough, this distinction is core to the *Metaphysics of Morals*, since it is there that he develops his taxonomy of duties and addresses the consequences that follow once one violates them. For example, Kant states that some violations of duties may deprive a human of her own personality, leaving one only with animality, and as a result making one "a plaything of the mere inclinations and hence a *thing*" (MS 6: 420, my emphasis).

But while in some passages Kant claims that animals are mere "things [...] with which one can do as one likes" (ANTH 7: 127), in those cases his tone seems descriptive, suggesting a discrepancy between his use of the concept of "things"<sup>8</sup> to characterize animals when compared with the overly derogatory sense invoked to refer to humans who violate certain duties.

Addressing these tensions may help clarify Kant's view on the moral difference between human beings and animals. Unlike animals, whose actions are directly

determined by their sensible nature, humans do possess freedom to act in accordance with principles. According to Kant's "fact of reason" (KpV 5:29 - 30), by acting on maxims, human beings become immediately conscious of the moral principle, which forces itself irresistibly on them (REL 6: 36; MS 6: 438). Whenever an agent acts on the moral principle, she simultaneously makes good use of her practical reason. While it seems unreasonable to hold accountable beings that lack the ability to act otherwise, the same does not apply to beings who, instead of making proper use of their practical reason, give up such prerogative and choose to act driven by sensible principles. Therefore, the freedom to act according to principles and the idea that a free rational will is unique to human beings, sheds light on the rationale behind Kant's negative connotation when referring to human beings losing their personality<sup>9</sup>. Crucially, giving up such a prerogative is so strongly criticized by Kant because moral obligations are grounded in the human ability to act according to principles, and particularly, to moral principles. It is therefore not surprising that the moral predisposition, i.e., the predisposition to "treat [one]self and others according to the principle of freedom under laws" (ANTH 7: 322) is the highest level of distinction between human beings "as opposed to the other inhabitants of the earth"<sup>10</sup> and acting against such natural predisposition may compromise one's own humanity and personality, thus "degrad[ing] humanity below the animal level" (LE 27: 392, my emphasis).

On account of such a conception of human nature in which Kant states that human beings hold an *autonomous* will, i.e., the ability to act on a self-imposed moral law, he recommends in his *Lectures on Pedagogy* (9: 449 - 450; ) a model of education that concentrates on the harmony between the natural predispositions to animality, humanity, and personality.

Notwithstanding the favorable approach to the predisposition to animality, Kant has no reservations in assigning only *indirect* duties to animals. In his view, direct moral obligation depends on a condition of relational existence, that is, it is only possible once a relationship between two or more rational beings or of a rational being with herself is in place. Part of Kant's argument is that such beings must, by virtue of their rational will, be capable of being passively or actively obligated<sup>11</sup> (MS 6: 443). That is, this is not to say that only rational beings have intrinsic moral value, but rather to stress the point previously raised: that moral obligation requires reason, since it depends on agents' ability to regard themselves<sup>12</sup> as part of a relation of obligation.

Another way to get to it is by saying that the beings within such a relationship must possess *dignity*, that is, something that by virtue of being inherent to their rational capacity, gives them absolute internal worth. (MS 6: 435). While having a price indicates that something "can be replaced with something else as its equivalent, (...) what is elevated above any price, and hence allows no equivalent, has a dignity." (GMS 4: 435). As Kant claims in the *Metaphysics of the Morals* (6: 462),

The respect that I have for others or that another can require from me (*observantia aliis praestanda*) is therefore recognition of a dignity (*dignitas*) in other human beings, that is, of a worth that has no price, no equivalent for which the object evaluated (*aestimii*) could be exchanged.

Acknowledging the dignity in the humanity of others (and in one's own humanity) is a duty of virtue that arises from the respect one feels for the moral law in these beings. In turn, respect is a typically human moral feeling that accounts for the main subjective condition according to which rational beings are capable of experiencing morality (REL 6: 27). Further, the feeling of respect is what makes human beings capable of incorporating the moral principle in the maxim of their actions, insofar

as it is indissociable from one's awareness regarding the authority of morality (KpV 5: 80).

Animals lack the abilities for respect and, analogously, do not possess unconditional internal worth and therefore dignity in Kant's sense. This lies at the bottom of Kant's claim that only human beings can be *objects* of our respect (KpV 5: 76), as well as at the heart of the claim that animals are not able to be obligated.

In terms of the moral relationship we may have with regard to animals, two notable implications arise. First, as discussed, the duty we have *with regard to* animals is nothing more than parasitical of the self-regarding duty to promote certain moral dispositions towards one's own moral perfection (MS 6: 443; VE 27:458 - 459). Along these lines, the duties we have with regard to animals are only indirect.

The second implication follows from the directionality of duties, in particular the idea that indirect duties are not lesser. Instead, they merely have a different directional structure than that of direct duties. Thus, due to the fact that duties with regard to animals are indirect, Kant famously forbids all kinds of animal abuse that might degrade the agent who performs it. For example, one ought not exploit animals' brute strength beyond their capacity, promote unnecessary experiments, or kill animals unnecessarily (MS 6: 443), and so forth.

However, by virtue of settling the attribution of inner worth in reason, the possibility of moving towards moral protection to animals seems highly unlikely. Assigning direct duties to animals would require that these beings do have absolute inner worth. However, within the Kantian framework, granting inner worth to animals would involve taking on counterintuitive outcomes, such as assuming that they are endowed with rational abilities and self-assessment just as human beings are, and that this in turn would make them *fitfor* or be *subjects of* moral obligation.

But pointing to this plethora of outcomes is hardly akin to claiming that Kant's practical philosophy is completely fruitless in contributing to the discussion about how we should treat animals. In what follows, I argue that Kant's account of self-deception plays a crucial role in prohibiting the core ways in which animals are abused in our times. I assess whether this account can successfully ground ethical treatment of animals. Moreover, I argue that if one is to comply with the ethos of Kant's theory while at the same time avoiding the most widespread behaviors that involve or contribute to animal exploitation, counteracting self-deception is key. Finally, I address the criticism that Kant's ethics is narrowly focused upon individuals and show how the account of self-deception applied to the treatment of animals can be insightful when it comes to collectively furthering moral progress.

## SECTION II

In discussions of Kant's claim of indirect duties with regard to animals, it is the promotion of right dispositions toward moral perfection that is typically invoked in the literature. As discussed, such duties are indirect because they are primarily directed at human beings (ends in themselves, capable of moral obligation) but may end up indirectly affecting how we treat animals. The duty to oneself that commands one to strive for moral perfection provides what we might call a "bridge" that grants animals a certain degree of moral worth. As Kant explains, this duty has two aspects:

[it] is narrow and perfect in terms of its quality; but it is wide and perfect in terms of its degree, because of the *frailty (fragilitas)* of human nature. It is a human being's duty to *strive* for its perfection but not to *reach* it (in this life), and his

compliance with this duty can, accordingly, consist only in continual progress. (MS 6:446)

This duality results from the discrepancy between the ends we must strictly pursue and the limitations imposed by human nature in terms of fulfilling this moral commandment. Therefore, this duty is deemed by Kant to be perfect only in terms of its object, that is, "with regard to (...) the idea that one should make it one's end to realize" (MS 6:446), while subjectively, it is an imperfect duty.

Striving for moral perfection, as well as all duties to oneself, involves the duty of self-knowledge, for the latter provides a guide through the reasons for the maxims we adopt, and therefore through the moral disposition we develop. Further, within the context of duties to oneself, and despite the fact that our self-knowledge is sensibly limited, Kant recommends that one ought to fathom oneself" in terms of "[one's] moral perfection in relation to [...] duty" (MS 6: 441).

But Kant is by no means naïve when dealing with human psychology. He acknowledges that the duty of self-knowledge, and thus the duty of moral perfection, is potentially hampered by tendencies to partiality in the assessment we have of ourselves, as well as wishful thinking that we have a good heart (MS 6: 441, REL 6: 42f).

In laying out the duty to truthfulness (MS 6: 429 - 431), Kant addresses these tendencies. Because it is perfect or negative, the duty to truthfulness is described in the *Metaphysics of Morals* as the duty *not to lie*, for lying is equivalent to "the *greatest* violation of a human being's duty to himself regarded merely as a moral being" (MS 6: 429, my emphasis). It is associated with another form of lying, the inner lie or (henceforth) self-deception. The violations that both forms of lying represent, Kant holds, are blameworthy in that they amount to violating the "humanity in [one's] own person."

Kant is firmly opposed to lying and self-deception insofar as they violate perfect duties to oneself. In effect, imagining some common situations of self-deception may be insightful to better appreciate the centrality that the prohibition of self-deception takes in Kant's ethics. Consider, for example, an *opportunistic carnivore*, who maintains that her eating meat is morally permissible because, given the scale of the industry that produces meat and its inability to be sensitive to individual demands, one's particular actions are not likely to increase the harm that is already done to animals in the production chain<sup>13</sup>. Suppose that the opportunistic carnivore additionally accepts that animals are capable of feeling pain and, furthermore, have an interest in their own existence and that, therefore, causing unnecessary harm to animals is morally wrong.<sup>14</sup> She however diverts her attention away from that in order to justify her practice of eating meat and thus to defuse moral problems potentially connected to her action. The failure to correctly assess her motivation (that is, the failure to be impartial when assessing the maxim behind her behavior) leads her to the idea that her action does not conflict with what morality demands. As a consequence, she can regard her action as good (or at least, not wrong) and still hold the thoughts that caused her to put the morality of that action into question in the first place. By obfuscating the possibility that her deed might be against duty, moral perfection is, for that agent, out of the question.

However, such a case is not merely anecdotal. Many of the actions that (in industrial societies) are performed against animals stem from rationalizations<sup>15</sup> whose justifications are reduced to what is described in the literature as "4Ns",<sup>16</sup> that is, in terms of the view that eating meat is *natural*, *normal*, *necessary*, and *nice*. According to Joy (2010), the ideology of animal abuse is built upon rationalizations concerning it being *natural*, on account of what is supposedly written into our biology as humans; *normal*, because it is a widely accepted social practice; and *necessary*, by virtue of

animal meat being portrayed as a requirement for human health. The fourth N justification (*niceness*) is further described by Piazza et al (2015) in a set of studies as referring to the hedonic pleasure related to the consumption of animal meat.

Additionally, some individuals embrace justifications more obviously connected to their alleged ethical concern. Some are discussed under the name of local consumption (Pilgrim, 2013), conscientious omnivorism (Rothgerber, 2015), as well as justifications based on the defense of the virtues involved in (ethical) meat consumption (Scruton, 2004).

Yet, with this body of empirical evidence in hand, one is in a better position to understand how the duty against self-deception relates to animal welfare. To do so, consider the following epistemic profiles: a) *Naïve individuals* are agents with little or no awareness of a specific moral problem who, for situational or constitutive reasons (lack of abilities) are largely incapable of such awareness; b) *Commonsense agents*, those with little or relative awareness of a specific moral problem under normal intellectual conditions of decision making belong to this model<sup>17</sup>; and c) *Committed agents* are, in turn, all agents with relatively high awareness of the moral problem, which amounts to a privileged epistemic position. An additional way to further lay out this distinction is to say that while naïve agents' reasoning is hindered by external causes, commonsense and committed agents are, in contrast, not situationally hindered by complex reasoning, being able to, for example, delve deeper into moral problems, compare different ethical traditions in order to determine the best course of action, and so forth.

Consider now that agents of all three profiles perform actions that cause harm to animals, such as, for example, meat eating. Is it reasonable to maintain that in all three cases, the agents are self-deceived, i.e., that they rely on the rationalizations described above to justify their moral transgressions regarding animals? The answer to this question is *no*.

Provided with information that conflicts with their beliefs on the immorality implied once one causes harm to animals, commonsense agents might resort to any of the rationalizations just discussed as a way to make meat eating acceptable in their own eyes. They could, for instance, appeal to the supposed need for animal protein to then claim that "You cannot get all the protein, vitamins, and minerals you need on an all plant-based diet" (Piazza et al. p. 118). It is thus plausible to claim that this would be a case of self-deception where the agent shifts her attention away from, say, factual data on nutrition in order to evade the responsibility to take a moral stance should she come to firmly draw the conclusion that eating animals is morally wrong.

The case of committed agents can also be reasonably described as involving self-deception, once, for example, an agent might engage in exceptionalism in order to act against her better judgment. She might claim that refraining from harming animals is indeed a universal moral requirement but that for situational reasons (e.g., the agent is diagnosed with anemia, which supposedly requires the consumption of animal protein), such a requirement does not apply to her own case<sup>18</sup>.

It seems, however, that such attitudes are able to be maintained, meaning, they are allowed to co-exist alongside one's striving for moral perfection. In contrast, fulfilling the duty against self-deception would prevent such rationalizations as it would guide the agent towards a more unbiased assessment as well as thoughtful scrutiny concerning the reasons behind one's actions with regard to animals. As a perfect duty, it would be even more authoritative than the duty to increase one's own moral perfection, as it outlaws all forms of untruthfulness the agent might engage in when assessing her actions toward animals. Unlike moral perfection, which admits different degrees and



may even be obtained in different aspects of the moral agent's life (e.g., someone may seek moral perfection concerning this or that aspect of her life), the duty prohibiting self-deception would be operative for most cases of animal abuse in which the agents' rationality is not externally hindered (as in cases of naïve individuals). Within the context of the treatment of animals, the duty against self-deception would be relevant for a significant number of cases (since most of the justifications that people typically use to justify their meat eating fit into the 4Ns).

However, whereas the distinction between the three profiles highlights where self-deception succeeds,<sup>19</sup> it also points to an important limitation of Kant's theory. It concerns whether the success of the account of self-deception in Kant's defense of animals depends on the agent's degree of self-awareness. As a matter of fact, that is precisely what prevents one from attributing self-deception to explain naïve agents' immoral behavior. One may object that Kant's recommendation in favor of an enlightened life circumvents this limitation. In the same line that he states "not to avoid the places where the poor who lack the most basic necessities are to be found but rather to seek them out", in other passages, Kant insists that "man has a duty to raise himself from the crude state of his nature, from his animality (...) toward humanity (...) [and] to *diminish his ignorance* by instruction and to correct his errors." (MS 6:387, my emphasis). However, placing the argument's strength into such reasoning is rather unconvincing. One would still need to take at least some degree of *prior awareness*, for instance, knowing that sick people exist in the first place, or getting some idea about their own ignorance, and then on how to diminish it, should one have the moral resolve to expose oneself to such situations.

This limitation is worth further elaboration, for it gets even more nuanced when accompanied by the criticisms stated at the beginning of this paper, i.e., that a moral theory overly focused on individuals would flatten social differences, stigmatizing both peoples and individuals whose culture incorporates animal exploitation. At the heart of such criticism is the implicit assumption that the traditions of each culture have absolute intrinsic worth, and therefore Kant's allegedly individualistic theory would bear poor resonance against those practices.

Regardless of how we deal with this apparent limitation, it must be emphasized that this criticism itself tends to rely on self-deception<sup>20</sup>. Notably, while naïve individuals would hardly be in an epistemic position to endorse such a reasoning, commonsense individuals often take an interest in it, by partaking in the naïve profile, feeling exempted from moral obligations towards animals. This would represent instances of self-deception whereby (1) commonsense individuals might voluntarily "remain naïve" regarding topics they anticipate to prompt moral obligations<sup>21</sup>, as well as cases where (2) these individuals instrumentalize naivety in order to feel justified in moral transgressions.

In the first case (1), the fact that someone resists the attempt to revise one's beliefs provides evidence that such an agent no longer counts as naïve, for the very attempt reveals one's clear interest in morality. Certainly, one might be *truly* naïve, but given the increasing availability and growing presence within the media of topics related to the ethics of animal abuse, the question then concerns how long one can remain truly naïve. As soon as she is aware that her previously taken-for-granted behavior may be morally problematic, an agent may qualify as what I am calling here a commonsense individual. As she strives to remain naïve, say, by persistently turning a blind eye to a problem's ethical standing or to considerations that would otherwise render such a problem worthy of moral regard, that agent deceives herself not only about her own beliefs, but primarily about her relationship and interest in morality.

In the latter case (2), it is not uncommon to see meat eaters<sup>22</sup> leaning on traditional folk practices as a way to justify their diet habits or their lack of attention to animal welfare. For them, animal welfare movements are to be accused of proselytism resulting from "first-world" privileges. Behind their argument is not only the misleading idea that plant-based diets are less affordable than traditional ones, but above all, that education, i.e., access to knowledge (and with it, leaving the scope of naivety) is a "first-world" trait. These individuals take the premise that for some people (indigenous communities, people from certain regions or social classes) preventing animal exploitation is simply not an option and extend it to themselves.

But the tendency to create justifications does not only apply to commonsense individuals striving to mimic naivety. Further behavior typical of individuals who want to evade moral demands and moral awareness may surprisingly lean in the opposite direction. This is exemplified by localist movements or individuals who identify themselves as vegetarians but eat meat. For example, localist arguments revolve around the idea that being aware of the origin of one's meat provides sufficient justification to render permissible one's eating meat.

Analogous to the case of commonsense individuals seeking to appear naïve, committed agents create contingent criteria they know they can meet to justify their transgressions. Free range, humane slaughter or occasionalism (when someone consumes meat only on certain occasions but still identifies with the anti-animal exploitation cause) illustrate some of these criteria. The difference is rather that such criteria involve attitudes in which agents often recognize the moral transgression as such, as opposed to the cases of commonsense agents trying to emulate naivety discussed earlier. But despite the differences, in both cases self-deception seems to lie in the same rationale, that is, in enabling those agents to violate their own moral conscience. By establishing and then meeting criteria contingent on that moral problem, these agents create false excuses that justify their moral transgressions.

From what has been described, it can be seen that self-deception is an extremely valuable idea to explain the persistence and pervasiveness of moral transgressions that are to some extent acknowledged as such<sup>23</sup>. Self-deception is present in situations where, faced with a moral problem, the agent offers justifications that mask their real motivation and that evince their interest in morality, while simultaneously rendering permissible in their own eyes what they perceive as potential moral transgressions.

However, it is important to note that self-deception does not arise in the case of truly naïve subjects, nor does the duty against self-deception. For Kant, once we know that a problem is a *moral* problem, we must act accordingly. But if we have no clue that a certain problem is worthy of moral consideration, then the obligation against self-deception does not emerge. This is particularly evident for cases of fake news and deep fakes, that is, cases where fabricated lies resist an agent's critical scrutiny. Of course, as a moral agent, one has a duty to scrutinize and revise one's moral beliefs. Yet, when it comes to some forms of fake-news but especially to deep fakes it may be argued that such agents are thrown back into the group of naïve individuals, insofar as those untruths bear the power to twist reality and completely obscure the moral relevance of certain ethical issues. It may seem that this is a weak limitation, since the ultimate success of fake news often relies on echo chambers, confirmation bias mechanisms, etc<sup>24</sup>, against which individuals would have a duty to be alert. However, reality distortions may be more pervasive than one would first imagine. This is epitomized by ideologies themselves, which essentialize certain beliefs, holding them virtually beyond the scrutiny of agents who are part of societies in which those ideologies hold sway. Furthermore, such ideologies impact the progression of moral and scientific knowledge,

for example backing biased research and outcomes, which in turn reinforce the prevailing beliefs. Consider for example the fallacious ideas that brain differences between men and women justify behavioral discrepancies, or that eating meat and dairy is crucial for being healthy. These naturalized ideas, advanced both scientifically and in the field of popular knowledge, disregard for instance how evidence on brain functioning was historically gathered (Rippon, 2019) as well as the existence of alternative and healthier nutrients' sources<sup>25</sup>.

To sum up, the existence of naïve individuals imposes an explanatory hindrance by which self-deception, and hence the duty against self-deception, fails to arise. This in turn stands as a limitation of Kant's account of self-deception with respect to animal welfare, as well as a range limitation of his moral theory to the animal question, because along with its non-applicability to a certain group of individuals, it fails to provide objective and universal elements for animal advocacy.

It is important to draw attention to the fact that such a limitation of scope is ultimately a weak one. This is because in terms of determining the moral community to whom a moral theory is addressed, one can reasonably maintain that no moral theory fares better in this respect. This is to be said that such a limitation is weak because it applies to any moral theory, since no moral theory is universally applicable to all scenarios. In other terms, moral theories typically assume that there are agents for whom moral problems do not emerge, such as children, comatose individuals, or cognitively impaired persons. While weak, this limitation certainly counts as a constraint as it narrows the scope of validity of Kant's framework of self-deception for dealing with cases of individual decision-making about animal matters.

A possible way to address such a limitation would be raising public awareness to moral problems, so as to progressively decrease the number of naïve individuals. However, while the limitation of Kant's self-deception account applies most clearly to individuals belonging to this epistemic profile, it is not restricted to that. This is because immoral deeds might result from self-deception but also from one's explicit rejection of striving for one's own moral perfection. Consider for example cases of *akrasia*, i.e., cases of agents who acknowledge the immorality of their actions and yet perform them thoughtfully. In such cases, self-deception *might* arise *post hoc*, to diminish the discomfort brought about by the moral transgression by means of shifting its moral burden (e.g., 'eating meat is immoral, it would be even worse if the animal had not been free-ranged, therefore, consuming meat from free-range animals is acceptable'). Yet, there are situations where a complete and utter disregard for the morality of particular actions might take place. In such cases, the nuisance and therefore the cognitive strategy of dealing with the moral discomfort does not arise. Although both cases imply the interdiction (to a greater or lesser degree) of self-perfection, in neither of them does self-deception *necessarily* occur. Thus, the ability of Kant's account of self-deception to deal with animal welfare problems runs up against not only the weakness of the will of particular individuals in performing moral actions, but also in the practice of clear-headed and unconcerned immoral actions.

That granted, further limitations<sup>26</sup> are claimed against Kant's ethics in general. Along with the one just discussed, there is a further broader claim according to which Kant's theory, supposedly over-focused on individuals' duties, actions and moral dispositions, tramples on more collective social considerations and creates situations that potentially blame individuals. While Kant's account of self-deception provides us with a plausible explanation concerning the *nature* of such criticism (meaning, that the criticism itself is based on rationalizations), its content also needs to be addressed. However, before I engage in that, I will briefly highlight at least two points according to

which Kant's practical philosophy and his account of self-deception may be fruitful when it comes to our moral treatment of animals.

Firstly, it is particularly important to mention that the way Kant grounds his theory on the primacy of reason has encouraged reactions that point to the inconsistency of using such an "intellectual gap" as a rationale for ascribing moral worth. The incongruence poses problems such as problems of scope<sup>27</sup>; leading to counterintuitive<sup>28</sup> or ruthlessly exploitative<sup>29</sup> positions. The emergence of those problems suggest the need for a significantly stronger philosophical reassessment of concepts (such as *animal dignity*), key to our understanding of animal moral standing. Such an undertaking was carried out by many Kantian philosophers<sup>30</sup>, who advanced their disagreements with Kant on animal welfare and, as a result, advanced theories tackling the gaps left by Kant.

Yet, what is usually overlooked concerning the set of rationalizations one engages to justify one's moral transgression, is that it indicates that *we do have reasons* to engage in animal abuse. For example, one may ground one's choices in aesthetic reasons (pleasure-oriented reasons), economic reasons (related to the cost of dietary choices), as well as social reasons (associated with avoiding social norms confrontation), and so forth. In the latter case, these reasons are often associated with what Joy (2010) calls *carnism*, that is, a belief system that promotes structural animal abuse while simultaneously discouraging its members from challenging it.

This leads to a second point that I believe makes Kant's theory especially fruitful in advancing the possibility of animals partaking in morality as legitimate subjects of our moral concerns. Since most harm caused to animals is unnecessary<sup>31</sup>, one may claim that, in general, animal exploitation is performed based on prudential reasons<sup>32</sup>, meaning that the maxims of these actions are happiness or, in Kant's words, self-love (rather than duty) oriented. Acting from reasons typically linked to the satisfaction of one's sensible desires or, in most cases, to the lack of moral maturity to claim ownership over one's agency and think for oneself, hardly cohere with Kant' ethos.

Contra this view, one could contend that there are cases in which actions out of duty are not required, since wide duties allow "a latitude (*latitudo*) for free choice in following (complying with) the law" (MS 6: 390). In fact, within Kant's theory, it is not an issue that part of our actions are merely prudential as, incidentally, striving for happiness is a natural fact of our nature<sup>33</sup>. However, in the following lines Kant asserts that latitude refers to the *priority* one gives to certain maxims (for, as discussed, duties of virtue prescribe ends rather than discrete actions). Therefore, it is fundamentally problematic that an agent, upon identifying a moral problem, creates exceptions for oneself in order to allow acting from self-love rather than duty. In this respect, and paradoxically, despite the limitation it sets, Kant's account of self-deception is crucially insightful. To say that we tend to ground on prudential reasons the performance of deeds that we, to some extent, acknowledge as moral transgressions, amounts to claiming that we perform actions whose maxims lack truthfulness<sup>34</sup>. That is, by rationalizing our reasons for action, we incur self-deception, instrumentalize the suffering of animals but most importantly, fail to regard ourselves as worthy of dignity and respect as well as an end in ourselves.

Yet, instrumentalizing animal suffering out of prudential reasons seems importantly inconsistent with the Kantian ethos regarding virtuous agency<sup>35</sup>. Virtuous agents, for Kant, are those who perform actions which have morally worthy ends. Under ideal conditions, they acknowledge actions that demand a moral stance and, in striving for moral perfection, act accordingly. As autonomous agents, we must

in *all our maxims* [...] not forget to be submissive to [reason], not to detract from it in any way, and not to curtail in any way—*through delusion based on self-love*—the authority of the law (even though our own reason gives it) by positing the determining basis of our will, even if in conformity with the law, still in something other than the law itself and in respect for this law. (KvP: 82, my emphasis)

From this notion, Kant idealizes a "kingdom" of autonomous beings, that is, "a systematic *union of various rational beings* through common laws" (GMS 4: 433, my emphasis), in which its members are legislating members who regard themselves as such, and who "carefully" (GMS 4: 463) navigate moral territory guided by duty.

The centrality of this concept<sup>36</sup> points to an important reply to the criticism according to which Kant's theory is overfocused on individuals, namely that, for Kant, moral progress is inscribed in the idea of community.

Implied in the idea of the kingdom of ends is the view that, within a moral community, the way its members use their freedom must be consistent among them, both internally and externally. This means that their will must constrain but also be constrained by the will of others, as well as internally by what morality requires. Put another way, these agents must be able to autonomously incorporate moral principles into their maxims over self-interested principles.

Such a task is, however, not without difficulties. This is because acting on incentives other than moral principles (such as, the satisfaction of one's own passions, interests, one's own happiness, and so on) amounts to an inescapable propensity that belongs to human nature. If this were an easy task, our society would not witness the persistence of ideologies of human and animal exploitation, let alone the rationalizations discussed above. Moreover, acting in such a way amounts to a tendency that is collectively self-encouraged, that is, one in which society's members tend to stimulate and even to reward. Take for example the connection between supremacist ideologies of gender and species, discussed by Adams (2018). Societies in which such ideologies are prevalent tend not only to favor but also to reward practices that subscribe to such ideologies. Examples are behaviors that associate and at the same time denigrate and objectify women and animals, or that connect meat consumption and violence against animals to traits such as virility, pleasure, and strength.

In *Religion* (6: 42f), Kant insists that in performing actions out of interests other than morality, one tends to engage in self-deception, *viz.*, "to lie to oneself in the interpretation of the moral law to its prejudice". As a natural tendency reinforced among agents, and moreover, while opposing autonomy, self-deception represents a hindrance to morality. Therefore, forming a moral community may be in the best interest of autonomous and virtuous moral agents. As Kleingeld (1995, p. 160, my translation) puts it, a community whose agents perform actions out of duty

aims at the moral improvement of all mankind, at the preservation of morality and the counteraction of evil. (...) As long as they are not united in such a way, people will seduce each other to evil (...) [due to their] innate inclination to evil. (...) The goal of an ethical community is to remove this obstacle to morality. Because the highest good, as a community of the virtuous and as a moral world, requires such a community, it is a duty to join an ethical community.

Thus, it is clear that Kant does not reject culture and collectivity. His practical philosophy rather emphasizes that moral progress amounts to an end that must be *collectively* pursued<sup>37</sup>. Crucially, Kant's practical philosophy, through its concepts of autonomous agency, the duties towards moral perfection and self-knowledge, but especially because of its prohibition of self-deception, is in position to accommodate the

view that in societies oriented towards moral progress, their members are entitled to make cultural demands.

But although the self-regarded duty against self-deception ultimately supports cultural demands for a decent treatment of animals within Kant's ethics, Kant's practical philosophy remains to be reclaimed to ensure that it is not misconceived and thus used to support rationalizations and further actions that prioritize selfish interests (be those individual or institutional) or self-interested principles.

## CONCLUSION

At the core of the Kantian ethos is the idea that all human beings should pursue the formation of an ethical community, that is, a kingdom of ends to be achieved by means of its members' moral behavior. That said, and with respect to how we should treat animals, two things are granted.

The first concerns the twofold function of reason. While the rational faculty precludes animals from direct duties, it also points to duties that result in the ethical treatment of animals. The self-regarding duties to strive for moral perfection and self-knowledge already drive the human will towards an ethical treatment of animals. However, as such, these are not completely efficient, as they do not prevent one from accessing one's actions in benefit of one's own self-interest, e.g., disfavoring the moral law. In this regard, the perfect duty against self-deception backs up the agent's duty to pursue moral perfection, since it ensures truthfulness regarding how the agent accesses one's maxims. As a result, when applied to how we treat animals and alongside the duty to strive for moral perfection, Kant's approach to self-deception prevents actions grounded in the agent's self-interest as well as in one's failure to properly review one's own beliefs.

Second, the very postulation of a kingdom of ends further stresses the social nature of Kant's theory, for even individual moral progress is a component of collective moral progress. The approach Kant takes in laying out the framework of his moral theory necessarily binds individual deeds (maxims of discrete actions) and the character of particular agents to a conception of moral progress that is, by definition, social.

Objections to Kant's theory as a viable approach to animal ethics because of its emphasis on individual duties are therefore misguided. Additionally, the universal character of Kant's ethics, which relies on the distinctions he draws concerning human and animal nature, serves ultimately a narrow purpose. For example, in the *Casuistry of the Metaphysics of Morals* Kant addresses a series of discrete cases, taking into account situational considerations that eventually emerge. Moreover, the very existence of imperfect duties, i.e., duties that command broadly, demonstrates that there is ample ground for discretionary maxims and actions.

In this setting, the importance of the universality of duty against self-deception becomes even more pronounced. This perfect duty provides a feasible compass for how one assesses one's maxims, one's striving for moral perfection and self-knowledge, as well as one's own character. Critically, absent the universal validity of this duty and the (universal) considerations of human nature, the path to moral relativism gathers its momentum.

However, even though Kant's account of self-deception appears to be a promising approach to improving animal welfare, it ultimately falls short in providing a convincing justification for the ethical treatment of animals. This is because, taken individually, the duty against self-deception stumbles upon significant epistemic

constraints, as previously discussed. The current scenario of epistemic unreliability stemming from the increase in reality-falsifying technologies underscores the validity of such a critique.

Therefore, someone who is interested in this perspective might ask: how does a theory whose ethos rests on collective moral progress come to be practically relevant to animal welfare? In this paper, I discussed the role of the duty against self-deception in addressing the question at hand. Notwithstanding the epistemic limitations it bears, in the context of Kant's ethics, and especially when paired with the duties towards moral perfection and self-knowledge, the duty against self-deception may be regarded as an effective touchstone for commonsense and committed agents who may need practical guidelines on how to navigate the global issue of animal exploitation.

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## NOTAS

- 1 See Korsgaard (2004, 2013, 2014). Wood (1998); Timmermann (2005); Herman (2018); Potter (2005); Callanan & Allais (2020); Camenzind (2018); Müller (2022).
- 2 Marxist-inspired progressive groups that do not identify the utility of the ethical dimension to social debate tend to criticize animal advocacy movements as superficial and elitist. Many rely on the widespread idea that material problems lack an equally historical and material analysis, thereby leaving little or no room for moral theories. While it is agreed that Marx does not reject ethics as a whole, it is arguable that he opposed theoretical models of which Kantianism is a part. For an informative discussion of the similarities between Kant's political theory and Marx's historical materialism, see also Wood (1999, pp. 226 - 244). Others find support in the distortion of postmodern social theories, such as Zygmunt Bauman's (2009). In this scenario, inadequate interpretations of Bauman's critique of the overfocus on individual responsibilities becomes ammunition for arguments against ethics focused on individual duties.
- 3 All things equal. For once one challenges central assumptions such as that the animals' worth is purely derivative and that, therefore, it is permissible to treat animals as mere means to our ends, such assumptions become hardly plausible. In this regard, see Camenzind (2021, pp. 07 - 08). Similarly, "to say that duties to abstain from cruel treatment of animals are not duties *to them*" (Potter, 2005, p. 33) seems particularly problematic.
- 4 See also KU 5: 464f.
- 5 In fact, for his time, Kant seems to hold a progressive view on animals in comparison to other philosophers. For example, unlike the mechanistic conception typically attributed to Descartes (Cottingham, 1978), according to which animals are described as mere automata, Kant does not deny that animals are capable of feeling pain or making decisions. For textual evidence on Descartes' views concerning animals, see especially Descartes' correspondences (Cottingham, J. et al., 1991) to Plempius for Fromondus (1637: 414 - 415) and to Renier for Pollot (1638: 06). In correspondence to Mersenne (ATIII:85), Descartes denies that animals are capable of feeling pain.
- 6 The view I advance here is in line with Kant's position that natural inclinations in themselves are not culpable (REL 6: 58), since the very idea of moral transgression is only possible through rationality (CON 8: 115; REL 6: 37). Moreover, it coheres with the idea that animality is a fact of human nature which no one can ever overcome (VE 27:441).
- 7 In the *Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant terms "conscience" the moral (and intellectual) predisposition and states that it is inescapable to all rational beings. Unsurprisingly, conscience underlies what differentiates humans and animals, given that the latter are capable of associative abilities, perceiving objects, or intuiting particulars (Golob, S. 2020), but do not have inner sense (VM 28:277) or a sufficiently sophisticated consciousness that allows them to reflect on their behavior or on themselves (ANTH 7:153). For an in-depth account of this aspect, see McLearn (2011).
- 8 In this respect there is a clear parallel between moral and legal obligations, both of which involve, for Kant, the possibility of reciprocal constraints, since those who obligate and those who are obliged must be capable of entering into this relationship in the first place. As summed up by Pinheiro Walla (2022, p. 141), such a "formal structure ensures that no one is bound by another in a way she could not, at least in principle, bind her in return".
- 9 I outline this example based on Almeida and Bernstein's (2000) consequentialist description of the *opportunistic carnivore*. People who, from a consequentialist point of view, see no moral impediment to meat consumption "suggest that a switch to carnivorousism would not,

in itself, result in any additional detriment to the welfare of any animal" (p. 205). In my interpretation, these agents are self-deceived to the extent that they favor a twisted consequentialist interpretation of reality in order to accommodate justifications for a matter they actually see as morally problematic (since, for example, they do not deny that vegetarianism is required in nonindustrial production scenarios).

10 Cf. Engel Jr. (2016).

11 The pervasiveness of direct and indirect rationalization strategies is drawn by *Piazza et al* (2015) from the findings concerning the insidious persistence of the so-called "meat-paradox," a paradox faced by agents who display a tension between their thought and actions of harming animals.

12 Although the studies refer exclusively to meat consumption, I consider this classification sound for the present purposes for three general reasons. First, because meat eating is *the* representative of human exploitation towards animals. Not only does it represent an enormous fraction of human abuse toward animals, but also, *qua* a food habit, it relates to a pervasive attitude in people's daily lives. Second, because the so-called "meat-paradox" is the best documented animal exploitation phenomenon in the literature (Bilewicz, 2011; Dowsett et al, 2018; Herzog, 2010; Joy, 2010; Loughnan et al, 2014), thus providing empirical corpus as well as documented qualitative and quantitative practical evidence for the present discussion. Third, because the justifications used to make meat consumption permissible are typically the same when it comes to further actions against animals, such as clothing, entertainment, etc. Additionally, because, as Joy (2010) and Piazza et al (2015) point out, the first three justifications (naturalness, normality and necessity) are involved in a variety of historical practices such as slavery and sexism, which in turn provides us with interesting insights into the magnitude of the use of psychological mechanisms with moral implications, such as self-deception.

13 In this context, self-deceptive actions are to be distinguished from admittedly *akratic* ones in that in the former, the agent seems to retain a certain interest in morality and resorts towards self-deception as a way to preserve her moral integrity, whereas in cases of *akrasia*, agents would be in a position to acknowledge their failure to act in accordance with their better judgment.

14 I will address this criticism more squarely at the end of this section.

15 Since access to certain information may trigger one's moral radar, moral agents who wish to avoid facing these moral considerations might choose to engage in a sort of *strategic* (Leach, S. et al., 2022) or *affected* ignorance. For a discussion regarding the moral dimension of affected ignorance as well as the practical applications to animal welfare, see Williams (2008).

16 Here I do not refer to the commonsense epistemic profile *per se*, but to the typical Western meat eater who does have material means as well as access in terms of knowledge to switch to a diet free of animal exploitation.

17 In this regard, see Cunningham et al, (1976); Allen et al, (2008); Wolk, A. (2017); Mourouti et al (2015); Molfetta et al (2022).

18 Significantly, the chief general limitation of Kant's theory is that it insufficiently ensures what is *currently discussed* as an ethical treatment of animals, and that by virtue of this, it becomes obsolete (Camenzind, 2021, p. 06). In particular, that it fails to grant animals integral ethical considerations (rather than merely parasitic on human interests). In this context, it is relevant to mention that although "the legislatures in Austria (1988), Germany (1990), and Switzerland (2003) have decreed that animals are, nominally, not things anymore (corresponding articles were laid down in Austria in the Allgemeines Bürgerlichen Gesetzbuch (ABGB § 285a) in 1988, in Germany in the Bürgerlichen Gesetzbuch (§ 90a BGB) in 1990, and in Switzerland in the Zivilgesetzbuch (Art. 641a Abs. 1 ZGB) in 2003)" (Camenzind, 2021, p. 06), the accompanying legal regulations are still under contention. The fact that the largest part of atrocities against animals (livestock industry) still takes place under the law is evidence of that. For a striking example of how the prevailing legal approach still favors an economic system based on animal abuse, see the case of animal rights activists convicted after live-streaming unlawful animal handling (Miller, 2022). Yet, despite the disagreements over such an understanding, it is striking that concerning the practical implications to animal welfare, Kant's theory not only differs but also comes up short when contrasted with rival traditions. This point is raised by Camenzind (2021, p. 05) who points out that, for instance, Reagan's utilitarian theory "leads ineluctably to veganism, the total abolition of invasive animal experimentation, and comprehensive dissolution of animal agriculture and recreational hunting, because these

- practices violate animals' right to bodily integrity, or their fundamental right to life".
- 19 A problem of scope arises from the difficulty of establishing differences between animals and persons whose rational capacities are hampered strongly enough to justify attributing indirect duties in regard to animals while direct duties to humans. According to Potter (2005, p. 305), taking Kant's view on animals *prima facie* would ultimately prevent the attribution of direct duties to "severely retarded [humans], those in a permanent vegetative state, those who are permanently comatose, irreversibly demented or senile, born anencephalic, and so forth."
  - 20 Potter, 2005.
  - 21 Wood, 1998.
  - 22 In this regard, I especially highlight the works of Korsgaard (2004, 2012, 2013) and Möller (2022).
  - 23 It does not seem possible, however, to extend this claim to assert that the entirety of animal exploitation is practiced for prudential reasons via self-deception to the extent that actions of agents of the naïve epistemic profile would not belong to this group. This sharply narrows down the success of Kant's account of self-deception in protecting animals.
  - 24 Although Kant assumed that the pursuit of happiness is a fact of human nature, he did not identify happiness with human beings' natural end (GMS 4:396), assigning the title of human beings' "true vocation" (GMS 4:390) solely to *the good will*, which is the product of reason and thereby holds unconditional worth.
  - 25 Note that Kant's recommendation in MS (6: 443) is that instrumentalizing and abusing animals is blameworthy, yet by virtue of the agent's duties to oneself. What I am proposing here is different in that it challenges Kant's own view.
  - 26 The idea of a *kingdom* of ends is core to Kant's ethical theory, as the variation of the categorical imperative's third formula illustrates: "Act in accordance with the maxims of a universally legislative member of a merely possible *realm of ends*" (GMS 4:439, my emphasis).
  - 27 It is difficult to argue that one's duties to oneself should be given priority over one's duties to others without leaving aside the exegetical commitment to the Kantian system of moral duties in general. However, it is worth noting that in some passages, Kant claims that there are cases where duties to oneself can take priority over duties to others, insofar as one's personality is a condition for claiming that one's actions comply with the law (VE 27:341; MS 6:417).
  - 28 The idea that rational nature and rational will amount to the ultimate source of unconditional value is often called *Kantian logocentrism* (Wood, 1998). According to this view, human beings are to be distinguished from animals in that the former are capable of freely choosing maxims that are objectively determined by reason.
  - 29 Furthermore, when it comes to morality, self-consciousness plays an important role. One must be aware of one's own worth, *viz.*, one must regard oneself as an end if one wants to conform with self-regarding duties. Put another way, human beings *exist as* and *are able to* regard themselves as ends in themselves. Conversely, animals possess no inner worth; they exist "only as means, and not for their own sakes, *in that they have no self-consciousness*" (VE 27: 459, my emphasis).
  - 30 It is worth noting that what I here refer to as common sense refers strictly to an epistemic profile, and does not parallel the category of common human reason discussed by Kant in the first section of GMS.
  - 31 The stronger claim that "all harm caused to animals is unnecessary" is disputable. Some argue that medical and scientific progress vindicates animal harm. On the other hand, evidence that findings from *in vivo* studies can lead to misleading conclusions due to the physiological differences between humans and animals points to an end to the use of animals for scientific purposes or, at the minimum, to a reduction stemming from the development of alternative, safer and more effective methods (Hartung, 2017).
  - 32 By rationalizing is meant an inappropriate use of the rational faculties, typically meaning in the moral sphere, privately or publicly presenting justifications with an eye towards the permissibility of certain actions. It refers to a flawed use of reason. For a systematized account of the term, see Sticker, 2021, pp. 08 – 10.
  - 33 It is worthy to note that moral actions are especially pronounced in the present time. This implies that agents are often confronted with recurring moral situations, thus having the opportunity to reassess their moral stance. In such scenarios, both prior and *post-hoc* justifications merge to reduce the cognitive dissonance caused by the mismatch between one's moral perception and the performance of transgression. Rather than offering a reasonable description of how self-deception operates along the lines of social psychology,

Kant's framework provides a methodology that allows the agent to assess one's attitudes toward animals based on a moral conscience, as well as a coherent system of duties that ultimately aims at moral perfection. In *The Moral Psychology of Individual-level Adherence to Symbolic Green Narratives* (2023, forthcoming), I discuss how Kant's framework may be clarifying when set alongside descriptive approaches.

- 34 It goes without saying that the fundamental problem with immoral maxims is that they are not universalizable. However, what I draw attention to here is that even universalizability crucially relies on truthfulness. For cases of self-deception, this becomes especially clear, as the agent might allow herself to violate morality by universalizing her maxims out of insincere premises.
- 35 See Bernecker et al. (2021), especially Ch. 9, *Echo chambers, Fake news, and Social Epistemology*.
- 36 Significantly, one must appreciate the part moral education plays in accomplishing such a social end. Kant's conception of moral education explicitly encompasses a view of collective moral progress that not only includes, but most importantly, extends beyond individual progress. This point is rightly raised by Wyrębska-Đermanović (2021), who argues that Kant's approach to moral education may help to promote the necessary individual changes, as well as to inform collective practices that address global issues such as climate change.
- 37 Meaning that it plausibly explains human behavior and at the same time provides a guideline for how one ought to act in moral matters in general, but particularly when faced with decisions involving animal exploitation.