ARTICLE PRESENTATION EXAMPLE
PHI 216: ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS
IMMANUEL KANT’S ARTICLE (7) ON ANIMAL RIGHTS
DAVE YOUNT

1. BEARINGS: Briefly describe the assigned philosopher/author and state the name of the assigned article that you are presenting.


The article I’m presenting today is written by Immanuel Kant, from two different works (and note that the dates given in the book is inaccurate – it should not happen again). The first section is from his Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals (written in 1785), which I gave you a brief account of recently in class. The second section is more directly relevant to animals, and is from his Lectures on Ethics (written in 1775-1780), and the actual title of the section in his work is “Duties towards Animals and Spirits,” but the “Spirit” part was removed here. I’ve already given you Kant’s biography, so we’ll continue with the next section after these notes: [NOTES: This is an odd first article for me to present, because (1) we’ve already discussed Kant’s life, which will not be true of future articles; (2) the title of the article, only in this case, is given by the editors of our textbook, but in the future, will be the actual title the author actually gave the article; and (3) future articles are written by contemporary authors. So please mention if someone is a professor somewhere, and give the date of their article (it’s on the first page of the article where the title is); it’s helpful to state this information, especially including the date, so we can put what each author says into perspective.]

2. OVERVIEW: Briefly describe what the author’s main thesis or point is, in the assigned material. What is the argument? What is the issue? How does the author support his or her position? Is the author making any objections against his or her opponents’ position(s) (if so, mention them)? Mention the author’s examples if possible, and you may bring in your own, contemporary or personal, examples – it helps students understand the material better.

[What is the author’s main thesis or point?] [NOTE: I don’t mind if you paraphrase the overview in the book, but the rest of your “Overview” needs to be mostly in your own words, with some important quotes you can mention, and you MUST mention at least something briefly from each section of the article, if it has sections.] Kant argues that only rational beings are ends in themselves, have autonomy, and are worthy of respect; everything else, including animals, are things. They are only instrumentally valuable, if that. Human beings are intrinsically valuable. Therefore, we only have indirect duties to animals, insofar as our treatment of animals affects our treatment of human beings.

[What is the argument?] [NOTE: Explain the points in your own words, to the best of your understanding.]

A. In the Section I: “Second Formulation of the Categorical Imperative: Humanity as an End in Itself”, Kant states that the will is a faculty (capacity) of determining one’s action in accordance with certain laws, by which he means moral laws (85c1). Rational beings have wills, and the objective grounds for the will are ends, which hold for rational beings, as long as those ends are assigned by reason alone. The means are what brings about an end. The subjective ground of desire is the spring (valid only for individuals); the objective ground of (85c1) the volition/will is the motive (valid for all rational beings) (85c2). Relative ends create hypothetical imperatives (85c1): EX: If I want to obtain a degree at MCC, I should take certain classes (but not in the moral sense of should – it is just something that needs to be done in order that a goal may be achieved). Humans and other rational beings (EX: rational aliens, if they exist) exist as ends in themselves, not merely as a means to be used by other wills (86c1). Everything else exists as a thing, of conditional and/or instrumental worth, to be used by wills. EXs: money and hammers only have conditional worth – only if the government backing the money is solvent, and only if money can buy something else of value, is money valuable; only if a hammer can affix or remove a nail, is a hammer valuable. But even if a human being cannot help or aid anyone else in any way (EXs: a
severely disabled person, or a hermit), that person still has objective/intrinsic value and is an end. So the categorical imperative is drawn from the conception of that which is necessarily an end for everyone because it is an end in itself, constitutes an objective principle of the will, and serves as a \( (86c1) \) universal practical (moral) law \( (86c2) \). Rational nature exists as an end in itself. The practical imperative is, in my words: Act so as to treat humanity, including yourself, always as an end, and never simply as a means.

B. In Section II, Kant states that we have no direct duties towards animals, because they are not self-conscious and are merely means to an end \( (86c2) \). We can ask why nonhuman animals exists, but not why humans exist. So our duties towards animals are only indirect duties to mankind. If a dog serves its master faithfully, then it deserves a reward because it has served a human, and the human should be loyal to the dog and keep it until death, even if the dog can no longer serve its master. This helps support us in our duties toward humans (which are bound duties). If the owner shoots his dog that is not able to serve him any longer; he does not fail in his duty to the dog (the dog cannot judge), but “his act is inhuman and damages in himself that humanity which it is his duty to show towards mankind.” \( (86c2) \)

He must practice his kindness to animals, because he who is cruel to animals becomes hard also in his dealing with men. “We can \( (86c2) \) judge the heart of a man by his treatment of animals.” \( (87c1) \) Hogarth (English artist – we’ll see the pictures in class) depicts a man who abuses animals as a child, then runs over a child, and goes on to murder. We appreciate animals’ care for their young (the more we come in contact with animals), so we love them \( (87c1) \). Tender feelings toward dumb animals develop humane feelings towards mankind \( (87c2) \). In England butchers and doctors do not sit on juries because they’re hardened at the sight of and accustomed to death. Biologists (vivisectionists) are certainly cruel to animals but they can justify their cruelty since animals are man’s instruments, but killing or cruelty for sport cannot be justified. A man who turns out his ass or dog because it cannot serve him any longer has a small mind. Therefore, again, our duties towards animals are only indirect duties to mankind \( (87c2) \).

**[What is the issue?]** The issue here is how one should treat animals, from a Kantian perspective.

3. **CLARIFICATION**: Is there anything about this material that you did not understand (after looking up unclear or unknown words, etc.)? What are you confused about? What did not make sense in the reading? What questions would you ask if you could talk to this philosopher right here and now? **[NOTE:** This is where I want everyone to be really honest and tell me if they were confused about ANYTHING. You will not have points taken off from your presentation for asking questions – answering questions will only increase your and everyone else’s understanding of the material.]

**I didn’t have anything that I didn’t really understand in this article, but I will answer your questions now.**

4. **PRAISE/CRTICISM/ANALYSIS**: What do you think about the author’s argument or point? Do you agree and why or why not? Do you have any objection(s) to the author’s argument? If so, how do you suppose the author would respond to it (or them)? Do you have a better idea, and if so, what is it? How does this author’s position or argument compare with other authors’ positions or arguments already presented?

[You can do a sort of pros and cons list here, and take a stand on what you really think. Try to come up with SOMETHING good to say about the article even if you REALLY disagree with it, or with an objection if you think it’s really great. Here, however, at the Praise/Criticism/Analysis stage, is where you can really let us know what you think – note that until this stage, we should have no real idea what you think of this article. To be fair to your opponent is to really give him or her the benefit of the doubt and lay out his or her position accurately, not throwing in snide or sarcastic comments, or saying that it’s wrong while you’re describing it. At this point, you really should not have a good idea of what I (or any presenter) think(s) about the arguments and points being made – this is being objective, and “doing good philosophy.” Pretend the person is in the room right now listening to you and is going to stand up and accuse you of being unfair if you get his or her view wrong! This pretending is for Steps 1-3 – for the Praise/Criticism/Analysis phase, you should still try to be fair, but let us know what you think.]
**Good things about the ARG:** Kant has some good reasons for treating animals well, because he’s ultimately concerned with the way in which we’ll treat humans. No matter what action towards animals you can name, if that action makes the person who commits it treat humans in a worse way, then that action is wrong, for Kant.

**Possible objections: OBJ1:** Do you think animals are not or cannot be rational, to any extent? If they (or some of them) can be, and arguably they do have rationality (we’ll talk more about this in discussion), then he is wrong when he says that animals are only a means.

**OBJ2:** Do you think we have direct duties to animals, not to kill, torture, or have them suffer unnecessarily? Isn’t Kant basically admitting this, when he says that we “owe” a dog our caretaking of it if it serves us well? Is it only that a person who turns out or shoots a dog who cannot help him anymore is “small-minded,” or is it worse than that? Why isn’t that person immoral, having nothing to do with the way in which that person treats humans?