

Valuing Our Humanity
Christine M. Korsgaard
Harvard University

I. Introduction

About twenty-five years ago I published a paper on Kant's Formula of Humanity, the principle that commands us to treat every human being as an end in himself or herself.¹ In it, I claimed that Kant's argument for the value of humanity goes roughly like this: because we are rational, we cannot decide to pursue an end unless we take it to be good. Most of our ends, however, are simply the objects of our inclinations, and the objects of our inclinations are not, just as such, intrinsically valuable. So we need some further story about why we take them to be good. That further story is that we attribute to ourselves the power to confer value on our ends *by* rationally choosing them. And in doing that, we attribute a fundamental kind of value to ourselves.² That is to say, we attribute value to our own humanity, a property which Kant identifies with our capacity to determine our ends through rational choice. I summed this all up by saying that humanity is the unconditioned condition of all value, and as such, it

¹ "Kant's Formula of Humanity" in Christine M. Korsgaard, *Creating the Kingdom of Ends*, pp. 106-132.

² "Attribute to ourselves" is deliberately ambiguous here. At the time I wrote the paper in question, I was inclined to think of the argument as establishing that humanity has something like intrinsic value; later I decided that on Kant's view, all value must be conferred by valuing agents, or, to put it a different way, that valuing is prior to value.

must be valued. I also argued that in various ways, the duties that Kant discusses in connection with the Formula of Humanity follow from the value we must set on what I called our power of, or capacity for, rational choice.

Over the years, readers of that paper and of a later version of the argument that I used in *The Sources of Normativity*³ have expressed doubts about a number of points. For instance, they have not been able to see why it should follow from the fact that something is the condition of all value that it is valuable itself. And they have not been able to see why, even if that is so, an individual cannot just value *his own* humanity, rather than humanity in general. In recent years, I have added to the perplexity of my readers by arguing that it is an implication of Kant's Formula of Humanity that we must value all animals as ends in themselves.⁴ Surely, many people think, if what we value in ourselves is our capacity for rational choice, then we must conclude, as Kant himself did, that the other animals lack value, or have only such value as we confer upon them.

These objections raise important questions about what it means to value something. I now think that this is a notion whose complexities I have not been sufficiently attentive to in the past. For one thing, the value we set on different kinds of objects shows up in quite different kinds of attitudes and activities. The way that you show that you value people, for instance, is by conferring value on

³ Christine M. Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity*. See especially §§3.4.6-3.4.9, pp. 118-123.

⁴ See Christine M. Korsgaard, "Fellow Creatures: Kantian Ethics and Our Duties to Animals" and "Interacting with Animals: A Kantian Account."

the objects of their choices or their interests.⁵ I would now appeal to that claim to answer one of the objections to my original argument – the objection that the fact that we confer value on the objects of our rational choices does not necessarily show that we set a value upon ourselves. I now think that in order to make that part of my argument, I do not need to defend the general thesis that if something is the condition of all value it must be taken to be valuable itself. Since what it means to value people is to confer value on the objects of their interests or choices, the fact that you confer value on your own interests, for no further reason than that they are your interests, shows that you do set a value on yourself. In taking what is important to you to matter, to matter enough to determine the ends of your actions, you reveal the value that you necessarily set on yourself.

Can anything be said in general about what it means to value something? A certain kind of metaphysical realism about value suggests that to value something is to respond appropriately to the fact that it has value. Value, so conceived, is a metaphysical property; valuing, the activity, is response to that property.⁶ Because I reject that kind of realism, I think we should reverse the

⁵ See also T. M. Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each*, p. 105.

⁶ The property might just be intrinsic value itself, as understood by G. E. Moore, or it might be the property of giving rise to reasons for action, on what T. M. Scanlon calls a “buck-passing” view. For Moore’s view, see his *Ethics* and “The Conception of Intrinsic Value.” For Scanlon’s view, see *What We Owe to Each Other*, Chapter 2.

order of priority between value and valuing – that is, we should explain value in terms of valuing, rather than the reverse. So my aim in this paper will be to take a closer look at what is involved in the idea of “valuing” something, and what Kant might mean when he claims that we both do and should value our humanity.

II. Valuing Morality

I want to begin by raising a question about a closely related issue – the issue of the value of morality itself. Kant associates the value of humanity with our capacity for morality. In the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, he says:

... morality is the condition under which alone a rational being can be an end in itself, since only through this is it possible to be a lawgiving member in the kingdom of ends. (4:435)⁷

Notice that it is a little unclear whether Kant is saying that a rational being can be an end in herself only if she realizes her moral capacity, or that only beings who have the capacity for morality can be ends in themselves. He clearly believes both, although the first claim – that a rational being can be an end in herself only if she realizes her moral capacity – must be read in the light of another claim which Kant makes – namely, that we never can never be certain what anyone’s

⁷ References to Kant’s works will be inserted into the text, using the Academy volume and page numbers almost universally used in translations of his work. Where I quote Kant, I have used the translations by Mary Gregor in the Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy series.

fundamental (or noumenal) moral disposition is.⁸ In other words, the claim that we realize our own value only through morality is not meant to imply that we are entitled to treat people whom we suppose have bad characters as mere means. It is meant to imply only that we must realize our own potential value by choosing morally. But suppose we understand the claim in the second way, as the claim that only moral beings can be ends in themselves. Should we agree with Kant about this?

In some recent work, I have defended the traditional thesis that human beings are the only rational and therefore the only moral animals.⁹ Now there are people who think that when you claim that human beings alone are “moral animals,” you are claiming that human beings are especially noble or admirable in some way that makes us superior to the other animals. But when I claim that only human beings are “moral,” I do not mean that only human beings are morally *good*. I mean that only human beings can perform the kinds of actions that *can be* either morally good *or* bad. Human beings alone have the ability to reflect on the grounds of our actions, to determine whether those grounds constitute adequate reasons for action or not, and to act accordingly. To put it

⁸ See for example *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* 4:407.

⁹ For my accounts of human/animal differences, see *Self-Constitution: Agency, Identity, and Integrity*, especially Chapter 6; “The Activity of Reason,” §4, pp. 30-32; “Interacting with Animals: A Kantian Account,” §6, pp. 100-103; and “Reflections on the Evolution of Morality,” especially §§4-5, pp. 16-23.

more simply, human beings alone have the capacity to act on what Kant called maxims or principles, and it is the character of our principles that renders our actions morally good or bad. So being a moral animal in this sense means being capable of being *either* morally good or morally evil.

Should we regard that – the capacity to choose in a way that is either good or evil – as a form of human superiority? Let me consider one argument that suggests that we should. “Substantive moral realists,” as I will call them, believe that moral obligations are grounded in mind-independent facts about reasons or values.¹⁰ When we recognize these facts, they think, we are motivated to act in accordance with them. For such philosophers, the claim that the other animals are not moral would apparently have to mean that there is a dimension of reality, the moral dimension, to which non-human animals are insensitive, or to which they lack epistemic access. The other animals do not act morally because, as we might put it, they do not know any better. This raises an admittedly silly-sounding question. Is the realist committed to the view that the other animals actually have reasons to act morally, although due to their lack of awareness of that fact, they do not act on them? Although the question sounds silly, there is an important philosophical issue behind it; namely, the issue of what we mean when we say that someone “has a reason” to do something. What relation,

¹⁰ For characterizations of substantive realism and arguments against it see my *The Sources of Normativity*, Lecture One; *Self-Constitution*, §4.2, pp. 64-67; and “The Activity of Reason,” §§1-3, pp. 23-30.

exactly, is named by “have” in this context? Intuitively, it seems that we can speak intelligibly of what a non-human animal has reason to do. The antelope who is about to be attacked by the lion has a reason to run faster, say. Of course the antelope herself does not exactly know that. She knows “to run,” as we might put it, but not that she has a reason to run. But in the objective sense of “has a reason,” we can say that someone “has a reason” even when he does not know and could not know that he has that reason. By “the objective sense,” I mean the way we use the phrase “has a reason” when we say, for instance, that if right now the roof of this building is about to cave in, we “have a reason” to leave the building, even if we do not know that. We are using “has a reason” in the “subjective sense,” by contrast, when we say, after the catastrophe, that because we did not know that the roof was about to cave in, we “had no reason” to leave the building.

The point I am making here actually depends on a slight extension of this familiar distinction, so I need to explain what this extension is and why I take it to be justified. The ordinary way of understanding the distinction between “objective” and “subjective” reasons relativizes a person’s subjective reasons to his beliefs about the facts. The question then arises whether we should also relativize a person’s reasons to his beliefs about reasons, that is, to his beliefs about what counts as a reason for what. When reasons are grounded in what have been traditionally regarded as formal requirements of rationality, the answer to that question seems plainly to be “no.” You have a subjective reason

to, say, take the means to your ends or to avoid believing contradictions regardless of whether you believe in the principle of instrumental reason or in the law of non-contradiction or not. The familiar argument that the principles of logic cannot function as premises shows this. Suppose that George does not reason in accordance with modus ponens: he cannot see how you get from “if A then B” and “A” to the conclusion that “B.” It does not help to add modus ponens as a premise – that is, to add, “If A then B, and also A, then B” to George’s list of premises, for you still need to reason in accordance with modus ponens in order to get any conclusion from these premises, and that is what George does not do. So the formal requirements of rationality neither can nor need to function as premises.¹¹ And it seems natural to relativize our account of a person’s subjective reasons to what he must accept as a premise if he is to draw the conclusion that he has a reason. But substantive reasons that are not grounded in principles of rationality must be accepted as premises in our reasoning if they are to guide us at all. And many contemporary substantive realists suppose that most or all substantive reasons are independent of rational

¹¹ See *Self-Constitution*, §4.2.4, p. 67; or, for an earlier version of the argument, “Skepticism about Practical Reason,” in *Creating the Kingdom of Ends*, especially §4, pp. 321-325. There I talk about whether the agent “cares” about, say, being prudent or taking the means, rather than whether the agent believes there is a reason to be prudent or take the means, but the argument is the same either way – the question is whether the force of these considerations depends on the agent’s contingent commitments or not.

requirements in this way.¹² T. M. Scanlon, in particular, argues that we should regard all reasons that way, except possibly the reason that we have to make our attitudes conform to our own judgments about what we have reason to believe, do, or feel.¹³ So if we are going to appeal to the distinction between objective and subjective reasons, it would seem natural, on a view like Scanlon's, to take a person's subjective reasons to be relative to his beliefs about reasons themselves. And that means, to borrow an example from Scanlon, that someone who does not believe that "the fact that his car will kill a pedestrian if he does not turn the steering wheel is a reason to turn it" has no subjective reason to turn the wheel.¹⁴

¹² For criticism of this view of substantive reasons, see "The Activity of Reason," §3, pp. 26-30. The alternative is to believe that all substantive reasons are identified by the application of the categorical imperative, or some other principle of formal rationality, to which an agent is committed by virtue of his rationality, regardless of his own explicit beliefs and commitments. In that case we need only relativize his subjective reasons to his knowledge of the non-normative the facts.

¹³ See Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other*, pp. 25-32.

¹⁴ I borrow the example from Scanlon's Locke Lectures, *Being Realistic about Reasons*, although he has also used it elsewhere. Actually, of course, the matter is a little more complicated, since if the person holds other beliefs about reasons from which this one follows, and we could therefore in principle convince him that this reason exists, there is still a sense in which he does have the reason, even subjectively. I think it is somewhat unclear whether Scanlon supposes that all reasons are within the reach of argument in this way. For more on this point, see Scanlon's accounts of how we learn about which reasons we have (in *What We Owe to Each Other*, pp. 64-72) and his discussion of Bernard Williams's defense of internalism about reasons (in the appendix to *What We Owe to Each Other*, pp. 363-373). Because of these complications, those who hold this sort of view characteristically reject the idea of a subjective reason altogether.

With that extension of the subjective/objective reason distinction in place, the question whether you have a certain reason, subjectively speaking, sometimes depends on whether you believe that that the reason itself exists. And then it may seem as if you can have reasons in the objective sense but not know it, because of your lack of knowledge about reasons themselves. So the claim I am envisioning would be that animals “have” moral reasons, objectively speaking, but fail to recognize that fact. But if the other animals have moral reasons but do not act on them, then perhaps we should think that there is a sense in which this makes them inferior to us, not blamably, of course, but in the way they are inferior in intelligence. There is something important about their own situation that they fail to grasp, and we do grasp that thing.

But at least some substantive moral realists would reject the view that their theory implies that the other animals have moral reasons but fail to act on them. The argument I just sketched depends on a certain conception of what realism involves. It depends on the idea that – objectively speaking – reasons are mind-independent entities or facts with intrinsic normative force. This in turn apparently implies that all that it means to say that you “have” a reason in the *objective* sense is that there is a reason about which you might possibly do something; and that therefore, all that it means to say that you “have” a reason in the *subjective* sense is that you are aware of this fact. The “having,” in so far as it is relational at all, is therefore a purely epistemic relation. Is the substantive

realist about reasons committed to all that? Thomas Nagel and T. M. Scanlon, to take two prominent examples, would both deny it.

I will have to fill in a little background to explain why. In *The View from Nowhere*, Nagel argues that objectivity is a matter of degree. You start from a conception of the world that is completely subjective in the sense that you take the world to be simply what it appears to you to be. You then form another conception of the world that is more objective because it includes you, facts about your position in the world, and the resulting facts about how the world appears to you, as among the facts that constitute the world. In your original subjective conception, tomatoes are red; in your more objective conception, it is also a fact that tomatoes look red to you. The claim that tomatoes are red, objectively speaking, is true to the extent that it survives into more objective conceptions, given the explanations of the appearances that are made possible by those conceptions. When the explanations are in, not all of the subjective appearances survive: some of them are dismissed as illusions.

The process of objectification that I have just described concerns our reasons for believing things, but Nagel thinks a parallel process can be constructed for identifying our objective reasons for doing things. Accordingly, Nagel thinks that we have objective practical reasons when something that appears to be a reason within our subjective point of view survives as such when we take up a more objective point of view that includes that appearance itself as a part of reality. When that happens, Nagel says:

The reasons are real, they are not just appearances. To be sure, they will be attributed only to a being that has, in addition to desires, a general capacity to develop an objective view about what it should do. Thus, if cockroaches cannot think about what they should do, there is nothing they should do.¹⁵

So on this view you “have” a reason in the objective sense only if you have a certain kind of subjectivity – the kind that allows for the development of an objective conception of the world.¹⁶

I think Nagel’s view raises a somewhat dizzying question: if something that is real exists only for someone who can form an objective conception of the subject matter in question, does objective reality exist only *for* such beings? Is there no distinction, for cockroaches, between the way they see the world, and the way the world is? In fact, there is a way to block this odd implication, but it draws our attention to an important disanalogy which the realist must posit between theoretical and practical reasons. To block the implication, Nagel could

¹⁵ Nagel, *The View from Nowhere*, p. 150.

¹⁶ It is unclear what the implications of this view are for animals with who have more sophisticated forms of cognition than we suppose cockroaches do, but who do not think about reasons. It depends on what counts as “an ability to think about what one should do.” For instance, suppose that an animal has a capacity for envisioning future consequences that sometimes modifies his desires, not because he applies some principle or does some reasoning, but causally – he responds to what he envisions happening to him in the future. Suppose the animal also has the habit of envisioning future consequences so that he is often effectively prudent. Does that count as “thinking about what he should do”?

point out that he need not deny that objective reality exists for the cockroach; he need only deny that the cockroach has any reason to believe anything.¹⁷ The proper analogy, he could insist, is between reasons for action and reasons for belief. But then it immediately becomes clear that the realist is committed to the view that practical reality is wholly constituted by reasons for action, while theoretical reality plainly is not wholly constituted by reasons for belief. To put it another way, realists about reasons must suppose that an action that is supported by practical reasons is therefore everything that it should be, while a belief that is supported by theoretical reasons is not therefore everything that it should be. Beliefs must also be true, and being supported by reasons does not guarantee that they are.^{18,19} This suggests, although obscurely, that “having a

¹⁷ Nagel asserts that “it is beliefs and attitudes that are objective in the primary sense.” *The View from Nowhere*, p. 4.

¹⁸ For more discussion of this disanalogy see my “The Activity of Reason,” §2, pp. 25-26; for an account of why a constructivist need not accept the disanalogy, see §§6-7, pp. 35-39. s

¹⁹ Nagel has another route to the claim that some reasons “belong” to certain individuals. In *The View from Nowhere*, Chapter 9, he argues that some reasons are agent-relative – that is, they have normative force only for the person whose desires or whose condition gives rise to them. I suppose you might think that the agent-relative reasons are “had” by individuals in a special sense. But that is not the sense we are looking for here: that sense supports a contrast between the reasons that everyone has and the reasons that only some people have, without telling us what it is for any of us to “have” or lack a reason at all.

The idea that reasons originate from the desires or the condition of particular beings suggests yet another sense in which reasons are “had” by individuals: the reasons that originate in something about my desires or my condition might be thought to be in some special sense

reason" in the practical sense is really something quite different from "having a reason" in the theoretical sense. Having a reason in the practical sense is having got hold of a bit of reality, while having a reason in the theoretical sense is more like having a clue.

Scanlon, on the other hand, holds the view that reasons are relational. A reason, according to Scanlon, is a three-place relation $[R(p, c, a)]$, which holds when a consideration, p , is a reason for an agent in certain circumstances, c , to do a certain action, a . This formulation is intended to block the implication that "having" a reason is just, so to speak, knowing that one that you might possibly do something about is out there. In his Locke Lectures, Scanlon says:

If we take the basic normative claims to be apparently non-relational claims that these things "are reasons," or apparently non-relational claims that certain things "are good," the question then naturally arises what these normative facts have to do with particular agents. (This puzzlement lies behind Chris Korsgaard's caricature when she says that according to a realist view we notice

mine, even if they are agent-neutral and so give rise to reasons for others. I explore this idea and draw attention to the difficulties of pinning it down in *Self-Constitution*, §9.5, pp. 197-200.

reasons “as it were, wafting by.”) The idea that the basic normative element is a relation avoids this puzzlement.²⁰

Scanlon’s view makes the reasons relative to agents by definition. Do animals have them? In personal e-mail correspondence, Scanlon said that he thinks animals have reasons in two senses: first, there is a point of view, defined by their interests, relative to which there is some reason to prefer some things to others; and second, they consciously act in pursuit of things that are often in their interests. But animals do not have reasons in the strongest sense implied by being able to think about or see them.²¹ Animals, it appears, have reasons in this lesser sense to do what is in their interests, but they do not have moral reasons.²²

In connection with this, it is important to note that Scanlon has another resource for denying that animals have moral reasons, even though he grants that they do in a sense have practical reasons. On Scanlon’s view, we have moral reasons because we have reasons to want to be able to justify our actions to each other, and we have those because we have reasons to want to be in unity with

²⁰ I am quoting from what is currently Scanlon’s fifth Locke Lecture. Scanlon’s Locke Lectures are forthcoming from Oxford University Press as *Being Realistic about Reasons*. The passage Scanlon quotes from me is from *The Sources of Normativity*, §1.4.8, p. 44.

²¹ This resembles Nagel’s view: in this “strongest sense” whether you have reasons depends on whether you could know that you have them. Scanlon says that he does not object to mind-dependence in this form.

²² These various conditions – the existence of a point of view, the capacity to act on the considerations generated from that point of view – are suggestive about what the relation R(p, c, a) is, or about the conditions under which it obtains.

others. The kind of unity he has in mind is the kind that we have when we treat one another with respect, making human friendship and other essentially human relations possible.²³ Morality, to put it succinctly, is therefore a part of our good. Since the other animals do not act on principle, questions of justification do not come up for them; so being in *that* kind of unity with others is no part of their good. Non-human animals therefore do not have moral reasons. So both Nagel and Scanlon would deny that their view implies that non-human animals “have” moral reasons even though they do not know that.

I believe that each of these views gets part of the story right. What I think they both get wrong is that they locate the normativity of reasons in something objective, whether it is a relation or a fact. And I believe that, because I believe that what Nagel gets *right* is that whether you have reasons *at all* depends not on what is out there in the world, but on what sort of subjectivity you have. Reasons exist in the first instance in the deliberative perspective itself. But the kind of subjectivity that is needed is not the capacity to form an objective conception of your reasons: it is rather the kind that Kant associated with autonomy, the capacity to make a law for yourself. The essential element of a reason is its normativity, and its normativity for you rests in the fact that you legislate acting on it as a law. What I think Scanlon gets right is the claim that animals do in a

²³ See *What We Owe to Each Other*, especially pp. 160-168. I do not mean to deny that the other animals have friendships, but those do not require mutual respect in the way that human friendships do. I will give an account of the kind of respect in question in §III of this paper.

sense have reasons, but that those are determined by their interests, not by moral considerations. As I argued in *Self-Constitution*, there is a sense in which animals are autonomous, since their instincts are the laws of their nature, and so when they follow their instincts, they are laws to themselves.²⁴ So there is a sense in which they have reasons. But their instincts concern only their own good. This may extend to the good of their offspring and sometimes to the good of their group, but it does not extend to anything that looks like general moral reasons.

The foregoing dialectic has been a little complicated, so let me remind you where we are. I was examining the question whether the bare capacity for morality should be regarded as form of human superiority. I had proposed that perhaps a realist about moral reasons is committed to the view that it is, because such a realist is committed to thinking that there is some important feature of the world, relevant to the actions of both people and the other animals, that we grasp but that the other animals do not. There are moral reasons for doing things, and the other animals fail to respond to those reasons. I examined Nagel and Scanlon's views because Nagel and Scanlon are examples of realists who would deny that their view has this implication. Although they think that reasons are mind-independent facts, they also think that only people "have" moral reasons.

If we suppose that morality is grounded in human nature, rather than in objective features of reality, we can make a simpler argument against regarding

²⁴ See *Self-Constitution*, §5.6, pp. 104-108.

the bare capacity for moral action (morally good or bad action) as a form of human superiority. And this is true whether we ground morality in our rational nature, as Kant did, or in our sentimental nature, along with Hutcheson, Hume, Smith, and their descendants, Gibbard and Blackburn. According to such theories, morality is something like the proper use or perfection of a distinctively human attribute, and since the other animals lack that attribute, the standards defining its proper use or perfection are simply irrelevant to them. Kant's view illustrates the point. I am counting Kant's view as grounding morality in human nature, because, as I said a moment ago, Kant grounds morality in a feature of human subjectivity. That is the form of self-consciousness that, as I said earlier, makes us capable of assessing the grounds of our beliefs and actions, determining whether those grounds count as good grounds or not, and issuing laws to ourselves accordingly. This form of self-consciousness makes possible a distinct form of agency, rational agency, that the other animals do not share. Morality is the perfection of that form of agency, and as such, represents a standard that does not apply to the other animals.

Of course, agency in general is an attribute we share with the other animals. And it is arguable that there is a sense in which the human form of agency, rational agency, is superior considered just as a form of agency. What I have in mind is this: Agency is a form of control. To be an agent is to be able to move under the control of your own mind. And it is arguable that an agent who can reflect on and evaluate the grounds of her own actions has more control.

There is a dimension along which we might judge ourselves superior. But having this additional form of control is not, in and of itself, a virtue. Nor, as many thinkers have pointed out, is it obviously a blessing – something prizeworthy rather than praiseworthy, as Aristotle might say.

These claims are not uncontroversial, of course. David Hume and the other sentimentalists believed that our moral nature is prizeworthy, in the sense that we are the happier for having it and acting in accordance with it. And he also believed that, because the moral sense approves of anything that tends to make people happy, the moral sense can therefore approve of itself. Just being moral apparently turns out to be a kind of virtue after all, or at any rate, something morally good.²⁵ But of course it is one thing to argue that a rational and social animal would be deformed without morality, and another to say that a different kind of animal altogether – say a tiger – would be better, or better off, if she were moral.

I think there is a reason why these claims seem so odd. The question of the value of being moral – and now I mean mainly in the prizeworthy rather than the praiseworthy sense – is one of a nest of what I think are rather interesting questions that arise once we take seriously an idea that I think we should take

²⁵ The views of Hume to which I am referring here can be found primarily in the conclusion of Book III of the *Treatise of Human Nature*, especially pp. 619-620, and in Part II of the conclusion of *The Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, pp. 278-284. The remarks in the text summarize an interpretation of Hume that I spell out in *The Sources of Normativity*, §§2.2.1-2.2.7, pp. 51-66.

seriously – namely, the idea that the good for a thing is relative to its nature. Just to give you an example of what I have in mind: John Stuart Mill famously claimed that it is better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a pig satisfied.²⁶ Mill believed this because he believed that it is good for human beings that we have access to what he called “higher pleasures,” like, for instance, the pleasure of poetry. But for whom is it better? Would it be better *for the pig* if he were Socrates? Why exactly would that be? Temple Grandin, in her book *Animals Make Us Human*, reports that there is nothing pigs love more than rooting around in straw.²⁷ Poetry is not good for a pig, so it is not something valuable that is missing from the pig’s life, that he would get access to if he were changed into Socrates, any more than rooting around in straw is something valuable that is missing from your life, and that you would get access to if you were changed into a pig. But isn’t poetry a higher pleasure than rooting around in straw? If what makes a pleasure “higher” is, as Kant and others have suggested, that it cultivates our capacity for the even deeper and greater pleasant activities of that

²⁶ John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*, Chapter 2. Actually he claims, on p. 10, that it is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied, and better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied, so I am merging his claims, by taking Socrates as the exemplar of humanity here.

²⁷ Temple Grandin reports that: “Pigs are obsessed with straw. When I threw a few flakes of wheat straw into my pen of piglets, they rooted in it at a furious pace... So far, no one has found anything that can compete with straw for a pig’s interest and attention.” In *Animals Make Us Human: Creating the Best Life for Animals*, pp. 185-186.

very kind,²⁸ then we must have that capacity before the pleasure can be judged a higher one for us. Since the pig lacks that capacity, poetry is not a higher pleasure for a pig. Of course, we might try the argument that, so far as we can tell, none of the pig's pleasures are "higher" in this sense. But then perhaps it is only for us jaded human beings that the lower pleasures seem to grow stale. So long as the straw itself is fresh, pigs apparently *never* lose their enthusiasm for rooting around in straw.

I believe that this point about the essentially relational nature of the good generalizes to other standards: it does not make sense to judge human beings either superior to the other animals or better off than they are by standards that only apply to human beings. But if we decide it does not make sense to say it would be better for the pig if he were Socrates, does that mean we have to give up valuing our own ability to appreciate poetry? And – by the same token – can we value our own moral nature, either as something praiseworthy or as something prizeworthy, without thinking that a pig would be better, or perhaps better off, if he had a moral nature too?

This question brings us back to the issues with which I began. In "Kant's Formula of Humanity" and in *The Sources of Normativity*, I argued that there is a sense in which we must value our moral nature. In *The Sources of Normativity*, in

²⁸ Kant says: "we correctly call these joys and delights more refined because they are more under our control than others, do not wear out but rather strengthen feeling for further enjoyment of them..." *The Critique of Practical Reason* 5:24.

particular, I argued that we must value our moral nature as what I call a form of practical identity, a description under which we value ourselves and find our lives worth living. The argument goes roughly like this: You affirm your value as the bearer of a practical identity whenever you act on the reasons to which it gives rise. But our moral nature – our capacity to give ourselves laws – is the source of the normative force of all of our reasons.²⁹ So whenever you act on a reason, you affirm your value as a moral being. But how can we value our moral nature if we can think neither that it is praiseworthy nor that it is prizeworthy to have a moral nature?

But it does not follow from the rejection of Mill's argument that we cannot value our moral nature. When we say that we value something, there are different things that we might mean. One is that we place it within a domain to which we think evaluative standards importantly apply – let me call that an “evaluable domain.” In that sense, the value we set on poetry is expressed just as much in our disdain for doggerel as it is in our admiration for Dickinson or Donne. A second sense in which we value something, of course, is when we have a positive attitude towards some item because it meets the standards of some evaluable domain within which it falls.

Valuing in the first sense, that is, placing something in an evaluable domain, is not merely a matter *believing* that the items in question are subject to

²⁹ *The Sources of Normativity*, §3.4.

an evaluative standard, but rather requires taking that standard to be normative for yourself in some active way. Someone could believe that a certain performance of, say, ballet or boxing is the sort of thing that can be good or bad of its kind, and not care at all about it, in the sense that there is no imaginable circumstance in which he would act differently because of that value. But exactly *how* you take the standard to be normative for you depends both on the nature of the object and on your relationship to it. The value you set on poetry might be expressed in activities of writing it, reading it, appreciating it, reviewing it – including writing scathing reviews of the doggerel – or making sure that the great poems of the past get preserved. But the value you set on poetry does not require you to consider it to be superior to say, prose, or music. And in the same way, the value we set on the life lived under the government of moral values does not require us to think that the life lived under the government of instinct and sensation is an inferior form of life. Of course if a creature whose nature calls for a life governed by moral values lives a life governed as far as possible by instinct and sensation instead, that *is* an inferior thing, but that is because for such a creature, that can only represent a poor choice about what to value.

A moment ago I mentioned my argument that we value our moral nature as a form of practical identity. It is written into the very notion of practical identity that you value forms of practical identity by living up to the standards that they set for you. So to value your moral nature, that is, your practical identity as a moral being, is to think it all-important that you live up to the

standards that it sets for you, moral standards. In that sense, you can value your moral nature, without thinking that you are a very fine fellow just for *having* it, just as a man can place a high value on his role as a father, without thinking badly of men who are not fathers. Of course once something falls within an evaluable domain, we value it in the second sense when it meets the standards of that domain, and disapprove of it when it does not. Here, of course, there is room for a thought about superiority: a good human being is, in a recognizable sense, superior to a bad one. So we do disapprove of *bad* fathers, even though we do not disapprove of men for not being fathers, just as we disapprove of people who do not live up to the standards implicit in their moral identity.

So one way in which we value our humanity or moral nature, then, is by seeing our actions as falling within an evaluable domain, and treating that fact as normative, by living up to the standards that apply to them. But that way of valuing our moral nature does not commit us to thinking either that we are superior to the other animals, or that we are blessed in comparison with them. It commits us to caring about whether we are good, to admiring good moral people for their goodness, and thinking badly of human beings, ourselves included, when we go wrong. But it does not imply any particular attitude at all about the value of non-moral beings.

But valuing our moral nature in this sense clearly is not all there is to valuing our humanity. The argument for the Formula of Humanity itself turns

on a different sense in which Kant invites us value our humanity. But this sense turns out to require some further distinctions, to which I now turn.

III. Valuing People

When we say we value humanity, in the sense involved in Kant's argument, we are using "value" in a somewhat different sense from those I have distinguished so far. Sometimes valuing something has nothing to do with placing it within an evaluable domain: it just has to do with treating it as normative in some positive way, as making some kind of a claim on you. This notion of "valuing" is unfortunately rather obscure, since there are many different positive actions and attitudes, and it is not clear which ones you are required to have or to do in order to count as valuing something. The only thing that seems to be clear is that, as I said before, there has to be some imaginable circumstance in which you would act differently because of the value. Anyway, as I said earlier, valuing people – and valuing the other animals – is like this: to value people is to take up some sort of positive stance towards their interests or the objects of their choices. Valuing people involves promoting their interests or respecting their choices, where we do that either by promoting the objects of those choices or simply by refraining from interference. In my early essay I tried to express this idea by saying that, in taking your own choices to confer value on the objects of those choices, you are in effect setting a kind of value on the power of rational choice itself. But in fact there are (at least) two different ways in which

we might understand what that involves. Interestingly, if a little awkwardly, both of them show up in the casuistical arguments that Kant uses to illustrate the moral implications of the Formula of Humanity.

To show you what I have in mind, I want to recall a familiar objection to Kant's argument. People sometimes ask: why couldn't I just value *my own* humanity? Even if the fact that I pursue my own ends shows that I value my own power of rational choice, what commits me to valuing that of others? This objection is based on the idea that when Kant talks about humanity being an end in itself, he is just talking about "humanity" or "the power to determine ends" being a property on which we set a high value, in the sense that we care about having that property, or think it worth preserving, or wish to develop it in appropriate ways, and so forth. But I now think Kant means something a little different. He means that we regard humanity or the power to determine ends as a property that confers a certain kind of normative standing, and with it certain normative powers, on the being who has it.

I am going to call these two things the "valuable property view" and the "normative standing view." To see the difference, let us consider some examples. First of all, suppose your intelligence is a property on which you set a high value. Then you might do things to protect it, like not taking drugs that cause brain damage, or you might do things to develop it, like solving mathematical

problems. And it at least seems conceivable that you could value your own intelligence in this way, without caring about anyone else's.³⁰

But now suppose you ask me, "In virtue of what do you have the right to vote here?" and I reply, "I am a citizen of this nation." Citizenship, as I understand it, is a form of normative standing: it gives its possessor certain normative or moral powers. You might reply, "Well, I am a citizen too, so I have the right to vote here as well." Notice that it would not make sense for me to respond, "no, *my own* citizenship has that normative implication – but so far as I am concerned, yours does not." Kant's argument for the Formula of Humanity, treats humanity, or the power of rational choice, as if conferred a kind of normative standing on us. Kant asks, "in virtue of what do we have the right to treat our ends as good, that is, to confer normative value on them, and so in effect to legislate values?" and he answers, "Our humanity." So the argument assigns us a normative standing in virtue of our humanity, like the normative standing we have in virtue of say, being born in a certain country. In fact that

³⁰ Actually, I think there is some room for doubt even about that – and this is one of the places that the obscurity of this conception of valuing shows up. The doubt is about whether you could value your own intelligence, without valuing intelligence as such, in the sense that my earlier exemplar valued poetry as such. At least if we assume that we are talking about someone who values his own intelligence not for the sake of something else that it gives him – say, pleasure in its exercise, or power, or a sense of superiority – but for its own sake, it might seem as if he must at least *appreciate* the operation of intelligence when he witnesses it in others, and perhaps deplore its absence, even if he would do nothing to preserve or protect or develop it. Could there be someone who values only his own poetry? To me, that seems like an extremely odd idea.

analogy is exact: Kant thinks our humanity makes us legislators in the Kingdom of Ends. Although Kant's way of putting this is to say that we should value our own humanity as an end, what he means is not that we should value the property of humanity or rationality in the way the person in my example values her intelligence. What he means is that we should respect the normative standing people have in virtue of their humanity.

There are two reasons why I think we should understand Kant in this way. The more obvious one is that merely saying that the ability to determine our ends through reason is a valuable property would do nothing whatever to explain why we take our ends themselves to be valuable. And that is the question from which I believe the argument for the Formula of Humanity starts – why do we take the objects of our inclinations to be good? And this brings me to the second reason, which is textual. Kant's answer begins:

... rational nature exists as an end in itself. The human being necessarily represents his own existence this way; so far it is thus a *subjective* principle of human action. (4:429)

As I read the argument, what Kant means when he says that we “represent ourselves” as ends in ourselves is that we take our ends to be good in spite of the fact that they are not intrinsically good. In so doing, we show that we regard ourselves as ends. Kant then continues,

But every other rational being also represents his existence in this way consequent on just the same rational ground that also holds for me;* thus it is at the same time an *objective* principle... (4:429)

Kant attaches a footnote to the phrase “on the same rational ground that holds also for me” which reads,

*Here I put forward this proposition as a postulate. The grounds for it will be found in the last Section. (4:429n)

I assume that what is relevant about the last section, *Groundwork* III, is its introduction of the conception of ourselves as members of an intelligible world that, as Kant says, gives the law to the world of sense (4:453-454). In that case, the footnote claims that the “rational ground” of our representation of ourselves as ends in ourselves is our conception of our rational wills as “legislative” – that is, normative – for what we do, and also, insofar as it is up to us, for what happens, in the world of sense. Each of us claims the standing of a legislator in the Kingdom of Ends, with a right to vote on what is going to happen, which we exercise whenever we make a choice.

Obviously, there are many concerns one might raise about the workability of this argument. For the moment, I am only talking about how Kant intended it. If he intended it in the way I have suggested, the claim that we are ends in ourselves is not the claim that the power of rational choice is a valuable property; it is the claim that in virtue of the power of rational choice, we assign ourselves a normative standing – the standing to legislate the value of our own ends. And

that commits us to assigning the same standing to every other rational being, and so to respecting his choices, and helping him to pursue his ends.

But there is a problem with reading the argument this way. The problem is that in some of his casuistical arguments, Kant argues as if we must *also* treat the power of rational choice as a valuable property. The two different conceptions of an end-in-itself both appear in the casuistical arguments. The two cases that Kant uses to exemplify our duties to others – the duty to help others, or promote their ends, and the duty not to make a lying promise – can best be explained on the normative standing view. We must promote the ends of others in recognition of the fact that they, like ourselves, have the standing to confer value on their chosen ends. We must avoid all use of force, coercion, and deception as forms of interference with the efforts of others to exercise their legislative rights. Force is like depriving someone of his vote; coercion and deception are like tampering with his ballot. But when Kant turns to the duties to the self, the considerations he urges are most naturally understood as springing from the thought that the power of rational choice is a valuable property. We are to develop our talents and powers as aids to rational choice; we are to avoid alcohol and drugs, according Kant's argument in the *Metaphysics of Morals*, because they incapacitate us for rational action. These duties seem to have nothing to do with our standing; they are the attitudes and actions of someone who regards rational choice as a valuable property. Kant finds it obvious that committing suicide is treating yourself as a mere means, but if we

understand the claim that humanity is valuable as the claim that it confers a normative standing, it is really not clear why this should be so. Why shouldn't a human being have the standing to confer value on her own demise, as well as on anything else she desires, provided that no other duty is breached? Kant is thinking of suicide simply as throwing something valuable away. That is a thought about the value of your humanity as a property, not a thought about your standing.

If we adopt the view that valuing humanity actually means regarding it as the source of a normative standing, not regarding it merely as a valuable property, must we give up the claim that these duties to the self exist? I do not think that we must. I do not wish to defend Kant's prohibition of suicide, but I think the other duties to the self can be saved. The two ways of thinking about the value of humanity that I have distinguished may be combined if we suppose that we are to regard our normative standing *itself* as the valuable property in question. And if my own argument that we must regard our moral nature as a form of practical identity works, then that is what exactly we should do. What it means to have a practical identity is not just to value oneself as the possessor of a property, but rather to value oneself in the performance of a role. So we should value our human identity, not merely as rational beings, but as legislators in the Kingdom of Ends. In that case, developing your talents and powers is like taking care that you are a well-informed voter; avoiding excess alcohol and drugs is like

not going drunk to the polls. These duties are expressions of respect, not for the property of rationality, but for the legislative standing that it confers upon us.

IV. Valuing Yourself

I think that Kant must have had something like this – that we value our own standing as a form of practical identity – in mind. But even so, there is something that it leaves out – a much simpler way in which the act of rational choice expresses a value we set upon ourselves. After all, your legislative standing gives you a right to “vote for” – that is confer value on – anything whatever; it does not have to be on the satisfaction of your own natural desires and needs. But Kant took it for granted that what we do choose, at least when morality permits it, is to satisfy our natural desires and interests, and the natural desires and interests and needs of those whom we love. What we confer value *on*, when we exercise our legislative powers, is not ourselves as the subject of those legislative powers, but ourselves as the subjects of certain natural interests – some of which we share with every living and sentient being. And that gives a quite different sense in which we regard ourselves – or “subjectively represent ourselves,” as Kant would put it – as ends in ourselves.

The two points that I have just made about Kant’s argument for the Formula of Humanity are related. The duties to others call on us to respect the normative standing of other people, by respecting their choices, and regarding those choices as legislative acts, that is acts with normative force. That is why we

are supposed to pursue the ends of others, and avoid using force, coercion, and deception to bend others to our will. But our duties to ourselves cannot consist in respecting our own choices – after all, we have to make those choices before they are there to be respected, and the duties of self-respect must be something that can guide the way we make those choices. As I have already suggested, respect for ourselves as rational beings demands that we choose in a way that makes us fit for our role in moral legislation. But what alerts us to the fact that we claim this role is reflection on the fact that human beings do rationally what every other animal does naturally: we pursue our own natural interests and the interests of those about whom we care, just as if those things were established as good. Thus the sense in which the conception of ourselves as ends in ourselves is a subjective principle of rational action is twofold. Rational action embodies the thought that we are ends in ourselves in the sense that we have the right to confer value upon our own natural interests. But it also embodies the thought that our own natural interests are worth conferring value *on*. And although I have not argued for it here, that thought can be extended to include the interests of other beings who also have interests, and with whom we share the world.³¹

Valuing our humanity, I conclude, involves a number of different things. It involves prizing our moral nature, not in the sense of congratulating ourselves

³¹ I argue for the view in question in my “Fellow Creatures: Kantian Ethics and Our Duties to Animals” and “Interacting with Animals: A Kantian Account.”

upon it, but in the sense of taking the standards it sets for us seriously, and doing whatever we can to live up to them. It involves respecting the rational choices of other people, and making ourselves fit to make rational choices, by developing and preserving our rational powers. And it also involves, quite simply, caring about ourselves and each other, not only as rational but as natural beings, whose interests we declare, through our moral legislation, to be worthy of realization, promotion, or pursuit. But it does not involve considering ourselves superior to other living beings, or require us to limit our moral concern to human beings alone. In fact perhaps there is no better way of expressing the value we set on our humanity, than by extending the reach of our moral concern beyond the boundaries of humanity itself.

Bibliography

Grandin, Temple, with Catherine Johnson. *Animals Make Us Human: Creating the Best Life for Animals*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2009.

Hume, David. *A Treatise of Human Nature*. 2nd edition edited by L. A. Selby-Bigge and P. H. Nidditch. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1978.

Hume, David. *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*. In *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*. 3rd edition edited by L. A. Selby-Bigge and P. H. Nidditch. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1975.

Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Practical Reason*. Translated by Mary Gregor in the Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy series. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

Kant, Immanuel. *The Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*. Translated by Mary Gregor in the Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy series. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

Korsgaard, Christine M. "The Activity of Reason." *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association*, Volume 83, No. 2: November 2009.

Korsgaard, Christine M. *Creating the Kingdom of Ends*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

Korsgaard, Christine M. "Fellow Creatures: Kantian Ethics and Our Duties to Animals" in *The Tanner Lectures on Human Values*, Volume 25, edited by

- Grethe B. Peterson. Salt Lake City: Utah University Press, 2005, and on the web at:
http://www.tannerlectures.utah.edu/lectures/documents/volume25/korsgaard_2005.pdf
- Korsgaard, Christine M. "Interacting with Animals: A Kantian Account" in *The Oxford Handbook on Ethics and Animals*, edited by Tom Beauchamp and R. G. Frey. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.
- Korsgaard, Christine M. "Reflections on the Evolution of Morality." Published on the web as *The Amherst Lecture in Philosophy* 5 (2010): 1-29 at:
<http://www.amherstlecture.org/korsgaard2010/> .
- Korsgaard, Christine M. *Self-Constitution: Agency, Identity, and Integrity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Korsgaard, Christine M. *The Sources of Normativity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- Mill, John Stuart. *Utilitarianism*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1979.
- Moore, G. E. "The Conception of Intrinsic Value" in *Philosophical Studies*. London: Kegan Paul, 1922.
- Moore, G. E. *Ethics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1912.
- Nagel, Thomas. *The View from Nowhere*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986.
- Scanlon, T. M. *Being Realistic About Reasons*. The Locke Lectures, 2009. Forthcoming from Oxford University Press.

Scanlon, T. M. *What We Owe to Each Other*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998.