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**Autonomy and Duties regarding
Non-Human Nature¹**

Abstract

The paper makes an effort to present a view that answers objections put forward by many philosophers that Kant's account of duties regarding non-human nature does not ground adequate moral concern for non-human natural entities. In doing so, I reject what I call the "psychological" interpretation of duties regarding non-human nature, and try to follow the "moral perfection" interpretation supported by Kant's texts. The latter interpretation is, in my view, also present in a reading of our intellectual interest in natural beauty found in Kant's Critique of Judgment. Finally, after I consider some objections, I assess Kant's contribution to environmental ethics: (a) despite his anthropocentric approach, Kant does not domesticate non-human nature as biocentrism does, and (b) even if his approach can be characterised as speciesist, Kant does not see nature as a mere instrument – either as "natural capital" or "natural resource" – but as indispensable for our moral perfection.

Key words

Immanuel Kant, non-human nature, duties, moral perfection, natural beauty, domestication

I. Introduction

The argument presented in the paper in hand is a rather modest one. It makes an effort to present a view that answers objections put forward by many philosophers that Kant's account of duties regarding non-human nature does not ground adequate moral concern for non-human natural entities. There is one common interpretation, amongst others, which I take to be mistaken, because it takes Kant to be merely saying that humans should abstain from animal cruelty and wanton destruction of flora solely because such actions could make one more likely to violate one's duties to human beings. This presents our duties regarding non-human nature as a kind of "rehearsal" for our "real" duties towards fellow humans. Instead, I shall make an effort to argue that Kant's account recognises much stronger limitations, since such duties are based on the imperfect duty to foster our own moral perfection, that is, our capacity for autonomy. At first glance, this seems somehow paradoxical. How can autonomy be related to nature, given that Kant's autonomy is, by definition, purified from empirical constraints? I shall describe why Kant thinks that we have duties *regarding* non-human nature that are stronger than the common

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interpretation. This will be justified by reference both to our moral perfection and our intellectual interest in natural beauty. Last, I shall also try to answer some objections to Kant's view, which attempt to "save" him from his alleged speciesism, but ultimately fail. Kant's contribution to environmental bioethics, although modest, remains a significant one.

II. The "psychological interpretation" of Kant's duties regarding non-human nature

Kant claims that what provides a being with *dignity* [*Würde*] (an absolute inner worth) and marks it out as an end in itself is its innate capacity for autonomy, a predisposition [*Anlage*] to "personality", the capacity to legislate the moral law and to act out of respect for the moral law, "freedom [...] under moral laws".² In Kant's theory, there is a deep connection between dignity and moral duty. In Kant's view, only beings with dignity are capable of "passive" and "active" obligation.³ Only beings with dignity can be obligated or can obligate others. Now, "duty to any subject is moral constraint by that subject's will".⁴ Given that, an obligator (a being to whom one can have a duty, a being capable of active obligation) must have a will that can impose a moral constraint upon the obligated. The obligated (capable of passive obligation) now must have a will that can be constrained by the obligator. Therefore, Kant isolates two necessary conditions for genuine moral status: we can be obligated only to a being that is both a *person* (a being with a free will standing under the moral law) and is "given as an object of experience, since the human being is to strive for the end of this person's will and this can happen only in a relation to each other of two beings that exist".⁵ The second condition suggests that human beings have direct duties only to subjects with wills because having a duty to someone consists of striving "for the end" of her will.

Kant defends human moral status in contrast to animal or non-human non-moral status. There is, of course, notorious arbitrariness regarding that which can be termed "marginal cases", that is, human infants and the severely disabled or people suffering from dementia, who fail to manifest in their behaviour much consciousness or consciousness at all of the moral law. I think that Kant has a principled answer to the ascription of moral status to such cases. First, Kant's analysis of freedom contends that freedom must be an original and essential predisposition of any being that can possess it, and every human being possesses it. The practical doctrine of original freedom entails that free rational souls must be essentially rational souls, which implies that moral status attaches as soon as an organism endowed with such a soul is generated.⁶

At this point, I shall not go into detail about Kant's view on the nature of non-human animals.⁷ However, animals are "endowed with sensation and choice", yet are "non-rational", they are incapable of rational cognition and, most importantly, lack a free rational will.⁸ In his *Lectures on Ethics*, he argues that all animals lack self-consciousness, which means that they exist "not for their own sakes".⁹ This is why we cannot have any duties *to* animals or non-human nature, but duties *regarding* non-human nature.¹⁰ Yet, is this claim equivalent to treating non-human nature as having a price instead of dignity, equivalent to treating it as a mere "thing"?

In §17 of his 1797 *Doctrine of Virtue*, Kant writes:

"A propensity to wanton destruction of what is *beautiful* in inanimate nature (*spiritus destructionis*) is opposed to a human being's duty to himself; for it weakens or uproots that feeling in him which, though not itself moral, is still a disposition of sensibility that greatly promotes

morality or at least prepares the way for it: the disposition, namely to love something (e.g. beautiful crystal formations, the indescribable beauty of plants) even apart from any intention to use it. [...] With regard to the animate but nonrational part of creation, violent and cruel treatment of animals is far more intimately opposed to a human being's duty to himself, and he has a duty to refrain from this; for it dulls his shared feeling of their suffering and so weakens and gradually uproots a natural predisposition that is very serviceable to morality in one's relations with other people. [...] Even gratitude for the long service of an old horse or dog (just as if they were members of the household) belongs *indirectly* to a human's being duty *with regard to* these animals; considered as a *direct* duty, however, it is always only a duty of the human being to himself."¹¹

It is important to note here that Kant's treatment of animals differs from an argument often attributed to him. This argument is that Kant's objection to animal cruelty focuses on the *psychological effects* of violence and cruelty towards animals and the destruction of inanimate nature on human beings, who can subsequently mistreat other fellow human beings or fail to fulfil direct duties to them, such as the duty to promote the happiness of others.¹² In this

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G, 4:428, 435–436; *MM*, 6:223, 418; *Religion*, 6:26–28, 74–76. References to Kant's works are from *Kants Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. by the Royal Prussian (then German) Academy of Sciences (Berlin: Georg Reimer, later Walter de Gruyter and Co., 1900–) with volume and page numbers followed by the pagination in the English translations of his works: Immanuel Kant, [1785] *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, in: *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant, Practical Philosophy*, trans. and ed. by Mary J. Gregor, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996 [*G*]; Immanuel Kant, [1788] *Critique of Practical Reason*, in: *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant, Practical Philosophy*, trans. and ed. by Mary J. Gregor, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996 [*CPrR*]; Immanuel Kant, [1790] *Critique of Judgment*, trans. by Werner S. Pluhar, Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987 [*CJ*]; Immanuel Kant, [1793] *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, in: *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant, Religion and Rational Theology*, trans. and ed. by Allen Wood and George di Giovanni, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001 [*Religion*]; Immanuel Kant, [1797] *Metaphysics of Morals*, in: *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant, Practical Philosophy*, trans. and ed. by Mary J. Gregor, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996 [*MM*]; Immanuel Kant, [1924] *Lectures on Ethics*, in: *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant*, ed. by Peter Heath and J. B. Schneewind, trans. by Peter Heath, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997 [*LE*].

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In the rest of the paper, I deliberately use the terms 'duty' and 'obligation' interchangeably, aware of the fact that otherwise they have to be distinguished. Generally speaking, duty is based on having a certain status, while obligation is the product of agreement.

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MM, 6:442, 563.

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Ibid.

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As argued in *Religion*, the predisposition to personality should be considered to be a predisposition of the human species. In the *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, Kant argues that the inclination to freedom is universal. Even a child who has just wrenched itself away from the mother's womb exhibits it; its cries are a protest against the constraint it feels in its inability to use its limbs – a view defended almost verbatim earlier by Jean-Jacques Rousseau in *Émile ou de l'Éducation*, Book I.

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This is well described by Patrick Kain, "Duties regarding Animals", in: Lara Denis (ed.), *Kant's Metaphysics of Morals: A Critical Guide*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, chapter 11.

8

MM, 6:442–443, 563–564.

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LE (Collins), 27:458–459, 212.

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Believing that we have direct duties to non-human entities, like both Paul Taylor and Holmes Rolston hold, is due to what Kant calls an *ambigolity* in the moral concepts of reflection [*MM*, 6:442, 563]. A direct duty stems from a constraint via one's will. A duty regarding another entity exists when some direct duty requires that moral agent to perform actions that happen to affect that entity.

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MM, 6:443, 564.

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MM, 6:452–454, 571–573.

sense, Kant *only advises* us to abstain from animal cruelty and the destruction of plant life. This is the dominant interpretation of Kant, which I shall call the “psychological interpretation”, and which has provoked fierce criticism branding the argument as a simple failure or a speciesist position.¹³ Indeed, if someone abstains from animal cruelty only for psychological reasons, which refer only to the human species, this line of criticism might be justified. Yet, this interpretation establishes only a weak link between morality and treatment of non-human nature. One can indeed imagine someone who is insensitive to suffering yet supports morally right actions, despite the fact that there is ample empirical research that connects animal cruelty with cruelty to humans.¹⁴ Sensitivity to suffering is useful, but not necessary for being moral *vis-à-vis* human beings, which is why abstinence from cruelty and destruction is only advised.¹⁵ This interpretation relies heavily exactly on the psychological tendency of human beings to transfer the way they treat non-humans to the way they treat humans, and vice versa. While true, the “psychological interpretation” should not be confused with a particularly “intimate opposition” to one’s duties to self, which Kant wishes to highlight, and which we shall examine shortly. There is something inherently wrong with cruelty to animals and wanton destruction of inanimate nature. This is disregard of one’s morally significant feelings, which is integral to one’s mistreatment of animals.

III. The “moral perfection” interpretation

I now want to argue that, in contrast to the said objections that Kant’s duties regarding non-human nature represent the foreground of the self-concern of human beings, Kant’s conception of our relation to nature is a sign of the opposite.

Let us go back to the passage quoted from the *Metaphysics of Morals*. Towards the end, Kant talks about a human being’s duty to himself, but does not identify explicitly this particular duty upon which our duties regarding non-human nature depend. However, later on in the same work, Kant identifies a direct duty to oneself to increase one’s own “moral perfection”.¹⁶ This is an imperfect duty, or a duty that specifies a maxim that one ought to adopt, but does not specify actions that must be performed.¹⁷ Moral perfection consists both in the purity of one’s disposition to duty (actions done *from* duty) and in attaining completely one’s moral end with regard to oneself.¹⁸

Now, this imperfect duty to increase one’s moral perfection should be distinguished from other perfect and imperfect duties to oneself which Kant presents in the *MM*. Kant includes perfect duties to oneself as an animal being, which require one to “preserve himself in his animal nature” and which refer to prohibitions of committing suicide and “stupefying oneself by the excessive use of food or drink”. He includes perfect duties to oneself as a moral being (commanding prohibitions of lying, avarice, and servility). Finally, one has the imperfect duty to increase one’s own natural perfection or to develop one’s physical and mental talents. In the passage quoted, Kant refers to the imperfect duty to increase one’s moral perfection.¹⁹ To prove our point, one could imagine a human being who fulfils all his perfect duties to himself and his duty to increase his own natural perfection, and still violates his duties regarding non-human nature. A human being is, of course, a human approximation of the good will, which acts out of respect for the moral law. Thus, if a human being is always subject to inclinations, he must instead cultivate virtuous dispositions that approximate the good will.

I think that Kant's account of the duty to increase one's own moral perfection allows us to offer a better interpretation of duties regarding non-human nature, which go beyond the "psychological interpretation". A person who practises cruelty to animals or wanton destruction of flora weakens in himself the natural dispositions that approximate the good will. This duty provides human beings with a moral reason to practise kindness towards animals and to engage in aesthetic appreciation of nature. Indeed, wasting this opportunity is missing the chance to fulfil one's duty. However, a person who misses the opportunity to be kind to animals or to appreciate beautiful nature does violate his duty, but perhaps in a non-culpable manner – he is not to be blamed – as long as he still possesses the maxim commanded by the imperfect duty to increase one's own moral perfection. He can still perform other actions.

Now, let us return to the quoted passage once again – in relation to the animate yet non-rational part of creation, that is, animals. Kind actions towards animals can cultivate virtuous dispositions, such as sympathy, because such actions can play a causal role in increasing one's moral perfection. Yet, there is a moral distinction between choosing not to perform actions that benefit non-human animals and choosing to perform actions that *unnecessarily harm them*. The latter is not only a missed opportunity to fulfil one's duty, but also weakens one's virtuous disposition and *decreases* one's moral perfection.²⁰ Kant uses many examples of this sort, some of them familiar, because they are often quoted in literature. I will briefly mention some of them. For example, "the human being is authorized to kill animals quickly (without pain) and to put them to work that does not strain them beyond their capacities".²¹ Also, "agonizing physical experiments for the sake of mere speculation, when the end could also be achieved without these, are to be abhorred".²² These are examples of unnecessary harm, and are to be forbidden. The "psychological

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See James Skidmore, "Duties to Animals: The Failure of Kant's Moral Theory", *The Journal of Value Inquiry*, 36 (2001), pp. 541–559; Peter Singer, "Not for Humans Only: The Place of Nonhumans in Environmental Issues", in: Andrew Light and Holmes Rolston III (eds.), *Environmental Ethics: An Anthology*, Malden: Blackwell, 2003, pp. 55–64; Tom Regan, *A Case for Animal Rights*, 2nd edition, Berkeley and Los Angeles: The University of California Press, 2004, pp. 174–185.

14

Matthew C. Altman, *Kant and Applied Ethics: The Uses and Limits of Kant's Practical Philosophy*, London: Blackwell, 2011.

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If such indirect duties are non-moral advice, there is really nothing morally ascribable concerning the cruel treatment of animals. Accordingly, indirect duty refers only to prudence.

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Ibid., 6:446, 566.

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Ibid., 6:388–390, 519–521. Paul Guyer identifies perfect duties as "those duties for which it is fully determinate what constitutes their

fulfillment (usually omissions)" and imperfect duties as "those duties the fulfillment of which (usually commissions) is indeterminate and therefore leaves open to judgment what actions and how much is required for their fulfillment"; Paul Guyer, *Kant and the Experience of Freedom*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, p. 321.

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MM, 6:446, 566.

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P. Guyer, *Kant and the Experience of Freedom*, pp. 324–329. See also Allen Wood, "Kant on Duties regarding Non-Human Nature", *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplement*, 72 (1998), pp. 189–210, here 195.

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See Toby Svoboda, "Duties regarding Nature: A Kantian Approach to Environmental Ethics", *Kant Yearbook*, Vol. 4 (2012), No. 1, pp. 143–163, here 157–158.

21

MM, 6:443, 564.

22

Ibid.

interpretation” would not fit well with them, because it cannot explain why there is something morally wrong here. In his *Lectures on Ethics*, Kant suggests that cruelty to animals betrays the presence of a moral quality that one ought to have.

“If a master turns out his ass or dog because it can no longer earn its keep, this always shows a very small mind in the master.”²³

And later he says:

“... any action whereby we may torment animals, or let them suffer distress, or otherwise treat them without love, is demeaning to ourselves.”²⁴

These claims that such actions always exhibit a small mind or are demeaning to ourselves suggest that humans have some direct duty to themselves which proscribes cruelty itself.

At this point, though, I would like to offer a more controversial and therefore risky interpretation of our duties regarding nature based on Kant.²⁵ For there is still, despite the analysis so far, the objection that non-human nature is instrumentally valuable for our moral perfection. I would now want to argue that behind duties regarding non-human nature there might lie something more radical. In his *Critique of Judgment*, Kant says:

“... to take a *direct interest* in the beauty of *nature* (not merely to have the taste needed to judge it) is always a mark of a good soul; [...] if this interest is habitual, if it readily associates itself with the *contemplation of nature* this [fact] indicates at least a mental attunement favorable to moral feeling.”²⁶

This passage often provokes puzzlement about the way in which taking an interest in beauty indicates a disposition favourable to morality. There is no doubt that it is neither the case that a moral response to an object is a necessary or sufficient condition for an aesthetic response, nor is it clear how an aesthetic response to nature fosters moral interests. A commonly held interpretation reads this as “a desire to find and experience natural beauty for no reason other than admiration and love”.²⁷ This common interpretation is akin to the “psychological interpretation” referred to above, which claims that, by habituating us to selfless reflection and conduct, aesthetics prepares us to treat other human beings not merely as means, but as ends in themselves.²⁸ Nevertheless, Kant’s passage continues:

“Consider someone who is all by himself and who contemplates the beautiful shape of a wild flower, a bird, an insect etc., out of admiration and love for them, and would not want nature to be entirely without them even if they provided him no prospect of benefit, *but instead perhaps even some harm* [italics mine, K. K.]. Such a person is taking a direct interest in the beauty of nature, and this interest is intellectual.”²⁹

Two things from this passage cast doubt on the commonly held interpretation. One is the unwillingness to accept that beauty is absent from nature, which indicates a desire to view, but also to *preserve* nature, even at the personal cost of suffering some kind of harm. The other is that the immediate interest is not an empirical interest but an intellectual one. Taken together, they seem to entail a duty to seek and preserve natural beauty. Now, this immediate interest, says Kant, is immediate because it is not mediated by an empirical interest or intention. This seems actually to be akin to a moral interest, and it goes along with his account of the moral law which provides its own incentive described in the *Critique of Practical Reason*.³⁰ For Kant, only pure practical reason can create its own incentive. Immediate interest in natural beauty is an interest of this kind. Its subject represents seeking out

and preserving natural beauty as good without qualification, and thus as a duty. Let us note here that the claim is not that every desire to preserve natural beauty is good without qualification, but that there can be a pure practical interest in doing so.

But what kind of duty is this? Let us return to our familiar passage from the *Doctrine of Virtue*. The prohibition on unnecessary harm, as an action that is “demeaning to ourselves”, is also true of beautiful nature. Let us remind ourselves that humans have a duty not to possess an *animus destructionum*, or the “inclination to destroy without need the useable objects of nature”.³¹ Kant also argues that our duty to further our own moral perfection requires us to appreciate and preserve natural beauty *without any interest*.³² Love for natural beauty teaches us how to love something for its own sake and not merely as a means to our own pleasure – which is the same capacity that we exercise when we value rational nature for its own sake and not as a means to our arbitrary ends. It is a transition from self-interest to a love which is independent of self-interest.³³

It has been argued, though, that what is described here conforms to the “psychological interpretation” of our duties regarding non-human nature, that is, that they are grounded on a duty to preserve and promote aspects of our sensibility favourable to morality, that is, our conduct towards other human beings, while intellectual interest in natural beauty is not, by itself, such a duty.³⁴ However, such a reading does not capture precisely the account of moral development implied in Kant’s account of intellectual interest. Leaving aside a very complex argument presented by Kant, I suggest that, following J. Cannon’s view, one takes an intellectual interest in natural beauty not according to the “psychological” interpretation, but according to a trace or sign that nature takes an interest in our moral development which is commensurate with the interest that one has come to take in his own.

In other words, interest in natural beauty derives from an interest in “the moral image of the world”, a desire to believe that nature harmonises with the acts

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LE (Collins), 27:460, 213.

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LE (Vigilantius), 27:710, 434–435.

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The argument presented here owes much to the presentation in Joseph Cannon, “Nature as the School of the Moral World: Kant on Taking an Interest in Natural Beauty”, in: William P. Kabasenche, Michael O’Rourke, Matthew H. Slater (eds.), *The Environment: Philosophy, Science, Ethics*, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2012, pp. 154–168.

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CJ, 5:298–299, 165–166.

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Malcolm Budd, *The Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002, p. 55.

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However, note here, again, that the psychological interpretation is not a sufficient reason

for treating others as ends in themselves. The Nazi had a great appreciation of art and nature, yet treated others as mere means without any remorse.

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CJ, 5:299, 166.

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CPrR, 5:79, 204.

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LE (Vigilantius), 27:709, 434.

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CJ, 5:353–354, 229.

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Something similar shapes the account of beauty as a symbol of the morally good in *CJ*, 5:353–354, 228–230.

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P. Guyer, *Kant and the Experience of Freedom*, Ch. 9.

of the human subject determined by practical reason or that there is cosmos instead of chaos.³⁵ In Kant's words:

"But reason also has [...] an interest that nature should at least show a trace [or give a hint that it contains some basis or other for us to assume in its products a lawful harmony with that liking of ours which is independent of all interest]."³⁶

Natural beauty is indeed the trace of a harmony between nature's products and the moral law, and this is signified by giving rise to a feeling of pleasure that is an experience of purposiveness, yet in the absence of a determinate purpose in nature. We can never *know* whether there is a purpose in nature, yet we can *feel* subjectively that there might be one.³⁷ This purposiveness without a (determinable) purpose that we find in natural beauty leads us to seek this purpose within ourselves. However, this happens *only* with natural beauty, which has a special significance, because it shows itself as if it were crafted intentionally and not by chance, in accordance with purposiveness without a purpose. The sign here is a sign that nature is animated by a purpose that harmonises with, or even takes an interest in, our moral vocation, and, thus, that we do not will the moral law in vain. Do note here that human art and beauty have no such special significance, because we *know* that they are designed by human beings.³⁸

Despite all this, it still seems doubtful that Kant gives us a reason to believe that nature harmonises with morality. It might be the case that, after all, nature is neither hostile nor hospitable to anything required of us by morality. Nevertheless, Kant's way of phrasing the problem in his ambiguous and controversial teleology suggests that nature (for practical purposes) must be *seen as an agent* who sets the same ends for us as those which are commanded of us by the moral law.³⁹ He, thus, defends a moral image of the world via an account of the means by which nature pursues the end of human moral freedom. In some of his other writings, particularly the *Idea of a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View*, *Towards Perpetual Peace* and *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, he gives such a description of, as he names it, "nature's secret plan". For example, nature uses all sorts of means, e.g., natural inclinations such as the seed of discord to "unsocial sociability", in order to bring about the perfection of the human being.

Two objections come to mind here. The first is the question whether this view is opposed to human autonomy. Famously, autonomy should be free from all empirical determinations. Second, what is the meaning of nature having to be seen as an agent for practical purposes? The answer to the first objection is that, to be consistent with freedom, nature may not set ends for humanity that human beings are not free to adopt or reject. The means that nature uses are only opportunities, and are effective only insofar as we adopt them. As to the second objection, it is true that Kant never hesitates to refer to nature as a 'person'. However, he does not look to nature personified as a postulate, but as a reflective concept, which allows us to evaluate our own conduct. This means that we *subjectively* ascribe purposiveness to nature for practical purposes. We do this through reflective judgment.⁴⁰

In this regard, natural beauty is a means of achieving our moral development. Yet, recognising this presupposes, as we have argued above, an interest in finding such harmony.⁴¹ Therefore, this is an interest in natural beauty as a means to moral development, as an experience in which we recognise ourselves *as nature* and *as free* at the same time. What is the implication of this for our duties regarding non-human nature? According to this interpretation, our duties regarding non-human nature are not merely instruments useful for our development, but seem to be nature's way of legislating to us, in a mirror image,

the formulation of the moral law as a universal law of nature.⁴² Let us remind ourselves that the formulation is as follows: “act as if the maxim [...] were to become by your will a universal law of nature”.⁴³ Although the content of the various formulations of the *categorical imperative* (CI) is essentially the same, there is a difference *subjectively* speaking. In the second formulation of the CI, one is not only to consider the universality of the maxim, but is also to *take responsibility* for one’s actions as if one were legislating one’s maxim to nature itself. It is true, of course, that we have different impressions of what inscribing something to nature might mean today, considering that we can see the effects of human activity on natural systems in ways that Kant could not have ever envisioned.⁴⁴ Yet, if we replace Kant’s lack of awareness of the effects of pollution, deforestation or climate change with our knowledge of the same today, Kant’s arguments can only become more pressing.

IV. Kant’s contribution to environmental ethics: A partial view

Before addressing the question regarding Kant’s contribution to environmental ethics, let us summarise and answer some of the objections posed to the interpretation of Kant here presented.

1. The first objection pertains to the nature of our reasons for treating non-human nature in a certain way. It goes as follows: indirect duty views misidentify the appropriate moral reasons for treating non-human nature in a certain way. This is linked to the “psychological interpretation” referred to at the beginning (which claims that the sole moral reason for abstaining

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Dieter Henrich, *Aesthetic Judgment and the Moral Image of the World*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992, p. 12.

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CJ, 5:300, 167.

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Beautiful forms are like ciphers through which nature “speaks to us” in a figurative way (*CJ*, 5:301, 168).

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What is designed in this way makes its purposiveness knowable in principle and, thus, subject to our control.

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There is no doubt then that we can project ‘gratitude’ or ‘loyalty’, for example, onto the behaviour of animals being the ‘analogues of humanity’, which are characteristics that harmonise with the moral law through the exercise of our reflective judgment.

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The notion of ‘analogy’ is developed in *CJ*, par. 59. It does not signify an imperfect similarity between two things, but a perfect similarity of relations between two quite dissimilar things. See also Howard Caygill, *A Kant Dictionary*, London: Blackwell, 1995, pp. 65–67.

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The account of the beautiful is not the whole story. In the consciousness of the dynamically sublime, we reflect upon phenomena of either immense magnitude or overwhelming power. Here nature does not appear as if it were designed, but in its chaos or in its wildest form, provided it displays magnitude and might – it relates to tornadoes, volcanoes and war. We can recognise there our physical impotence, but also our ability to judge ourselves to be independent of nature.

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See J. Cannon, “Nature as the School of the Moral World”.

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G, 4:421, 73.

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Indeed, Kant could not have ever imagined our immense impact on biodiversity or climate. For an interesting account of the impact of climate change on non-human nature, see Clare Palmer, “Does Nature Matter? The Place of the Nonhuman in the Ethics of Climate Change”, in: Denis G. Arnold (ed.), *The Ethics of Global Climate Change*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011, pp. 272–291.

from animal cruelty and wanton destruction of flora and fauna is that such actions make us more likely to violate our direct duties to human beings), because one can indeed find no moral reason. But, according to my interpretation, the moral reason is related to our moral perfection.

2. In addition to the dominant “psychological interpretation”, there is another objection to Kant’s treatment of animals. It pertains to Kant’s characterisation of our duties regarding animals as indirect duties.⁴⁵ The identification of something as an indirect duty reveals that it is only a means of fulfilling a direct duty. In the case of animals, treating them decently is a mere means of taking care of our own moral well-being, and there would be no duty if neglect did not lead to adverse effects on our moral capacities.⁴⁶ But Kant’s emphasis is on what mistreatment *expresses* about one’s feelings and moral perfection, rather than on the effects of mistreatment on oneself or another, which we also have reasons to doubt empirically speaking. Proper treatment of animals is a necessary condition for, and perhaps a constitutive part of, one’s moral perfection, rather than a mere “instrumental” means to it.
3. A further objection goes as follows: Allen Wood agrees that, for Kant, our duties regarding nature derive generally from a duty to self to promote our own moral perfection by behaving in ways that encourage a morally good disposition in ourselves. But Wood worries that this does not rule out the possibility of a “quirk of human psychology” that would make abusing animals or destroying nature conducive to moral goodness by perhaps getting violent impulses out of one’s system.⁴⁷ His answer is the rejection of confining moral obligations to persons, and the argument that we have duties to non-rational beings that “bear the right relations to rational nature”, such as “having rational nature only potentially, or virtually, or having had it in the past, or having parts of it or necessary conditions of it”. But the “quirk” that Wood worries about is incompatible with Kant’s connection of nature to moral education.
4. Last, it has been argued that, by focusing on the self-regard of the human being, Kant’s account seems to foreground the self-concern of the human being, and marginalises proper consideration of the nature and well-being of animals.⁴⁸ One might argue that this is egoistic. It is true that part of what Kant insists upon is the fact that a self-respecting person is concerned with the fate of animals and non-human nature. He regards them as proper objects of love and sympathy, and he acts in ways that preserve his own disposition to such love and sympathy. But the same thing happens in the case of (direct) duties to other human beings.⁴⁹ Furthermore, appreciation of natural beauty checks our egocentric presumption that our own point of view is the only one, and habituates us to disinterestedness.

Could Kant teach us anything about environmental ethics? First of all, I think his overall view agrees with a specific objection to most contemporary theories of environmental ethics:

“The idea of ascribing interests to species, natural phenomena, and so on, as a way of making sense of our concern for these things, is part of a project of trying to extend into nature our concern to each other, by moralising our relations to nature. I suspect, however, that that is to look in precisely the wrong direction. If we are to understand these things, we need to look to our ideas of nature itself, and to ways in which it precisely lies outside the *domestication* (emphasis mine, K. K.) of our relations to each other.”⁵⁰

This criticism applies to most contemporary views on the grounding of our duties to non-human nature and cuts, in my view, deep enough. It surely applies to Peter Singer’s animal liberation, to Tom Regan’s ascription of rights to animals,

and, of course, to Paul Taylor's biocentric ethic. Domestication of non-human nature establishes a connection with nature, which tries to find within it features that it shares with human beings, i.e., sentience, interests, or traces of rational nature. Duties to it are grounded on recognised human traits. Domestication equals moralisation. This approach is, in my view, vulnerable to the objection of *anthropomorphism*, although in a far more modest version.⁵¹ Kant connects autonomy to nature, but he does not moralise about our relation to it.

A second, and last, point that I would like to highlight goes hand in hand with the frequent criticism of Kant that his view is speciesist and disappointingly anthropocentric. To be sure, his view is anthropocentric, because it grounds our relation to nature on duties that we have to other human beings and to ourselves. Yet, it is not vulnerable to anthropomorphism, because this kind of relation does not domesticate nature, but brings us closer to it by regarding it as a proper object of love and sympathy, albeit not respect. Even if his approach can be characterised as speciesist, Kant does not see nature as a mere instrument – either as “natural capital” or “natural resource” – common in mainstream environmental economics, but indispensable for our moral perfection.⁵² Most contemporary environmental bioethics strive to save the planet along with its non-human inhabitants from human intervention by taking a non-anthropocentric standpoint. Indeed, Kant may not have much to say about our technological intervention in nature, yet, in any case, he gave us the means of recognising that non-human nature is the mirror of our conduct.

Kostas Koukouzelis

Autonomija i dužnosti prema ne-ljudskoj prirodi

Sažetak

U članku se nastoji prikazati gledište koje odgovara na primjedbe mnogih filozofa da Kantovo shvaćanje dužnosti prema ne-ljudskoj prirodi nije odgovarajuća osnovica za utemeljenje moralnoga obzira prema ne-ljudskim prirodnim entitetima. Time opovrgavam ono što nazivam »psihološkom« interpretacijom dužnosti prema ne-ljudskoj prirodi te pokušavam slijediti interpretaciju na osnovi »moralnog usavršavanja«, koja se zasniva na Kantovim tekstovima. Smatram da se ovu drugu interpretaciju može izvesti i iz našeg umskog interesa za prirodnu ljepotu, kako je on prikazan u Kantovoj Kritici moći suđenja. Naposljetku, nakon što razmotrim neke prigovore, osvrćem se na Kantov doprinos ekološkoj etici: (a) bez obzira na njegov antropocentrički pri-

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Jens Timmermann, “When the Tail Wags the Dog: Animal Welfare and Indirect Duty in Kantian Ethics”, *Kantian Review*, 10 (2005), pp. 128–149.

46

Ibid., pp. 140, 143n10.

47

See A. Wood, “Kant on Duties regarding Non-Human Nature”.

48

Ibid., p. 194.

49

P. Kain, “Duties regarding Animals”, p. 27.

50

Bernard Williams, “Must a Concern for the Environment be Centered on Human Beings?”, in:

Bernard Williams, *Making Sense of Humanity and Other Philosophical Papers 1982–1993*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995, p. 237.

51

For a good discussion of anthropomorphism and its relevance to environmental ethics, see Fredrik Karlsson, “Critical Anthropomorphism and Animal Ethics”, *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics*, Vol. 25 (2012), No. 5, pp. 707–720.

52

See also Filimon Peonidis, “Kant’s Not So Bad Speciesism”, in: Evangelos D. Protopapadakis (ed.), *Animal Ethics: Past and Present Perspectives*, Berlin: Logos Verlag, 2012, pp. 141–150.

stup, Kant ne pripitomljava ne-ljudsku prirodu kao što to čini biocentrizam, te (b) iako se njegov pristup može označiti kao specijistički, Kant ne gleda na prirodu kao na puko sredstvo – bilo kao na »prirodni kapital« ili kao na »prirodni resurs« – nego je smatra nečim što je neophodno za naše moralno usavršavanje.

Ključne riječi

Immanuel Kant, ne-ljudska priroda, dužnosti, moralno usavršavanje, prirodna ljepota, pripitomljavanje

Kostas Koukouzelis

Autonomie und Pflichten gegenüber der nicht-menschlichen Natur

Zusammenfassung

In dem Artikel ist man bestrebt, den Blickwinkel darzustellen, der auf die Einwendungen vielerlei Philosophen erwidert, wonach Kants Auffassung der Pflichten gegenüber der nicht-menschlichen Natur keine entsprechende Basis zur Gründung der moralischen Rücksicht gegenüber den nicht-menschlichen natürlichen Entitäten ist. Damit widerlege ich jenes, was ich „psychologische“ Interpretation der Pflichten gegenüber der nicht-menschlichen Natur nenne, und versuche der Interpretation auf der Basis „moralischer Vervollkommnung“ zu folgen, welche auf Kants Texten aufbaut. Nach meinem Erachten lässt sich diese zweite Interpretation auch aus unserem intellektuellen Interesse an der Schönheit der Natur herleiten, wie dieses in Kants Kritik der Urteilskraft geschildert wird. Schließlich, nachdem ich einige Einwände in Betracht gezogen habe, blicke ich zurück auf Kants Beitrag zur ökologischen Ethik: (a) Ungeachtet seines anthropozentrischen Ansatzes zähmt Kant die nicht-menschliche Natur nicht in der Art, wie es der Biozentrismus tut und (b) Obgleich sich sein Ansatz als speziesistisch bezeichnen lässt, nimmt Kant die Natur nicht als bloßes Mittel in Augenschein – sei es als „natürliches Kapital“, sei es als „natürliche Ressource“ – sondern sieht sie als Unentbehrlichkeit für unsere moralische Vervollkommnung an.

Schlüsselwörter

Immanuel Kant, nicht-menschliche Natur, Pflichten, moralische Vervollkommnung, Schönheit der Natur, Zählung

Kostas Koukouzelis

Autonomie et devoirs envers la nature non humaine

Résumé

Cet article tente de montrer le point de vue qui répond aux remarques de nombreux philosophes selon lesquels, la conception de Kant du devoir envers la nature non humaine ne constitue pas une base adéquate pour fonder un respect morale envers les entités naturelles non humaines. Par là, je réfute ce que j'appelle l'interprétation « psychologique » du devoir envers la nature non humaine et je tente de suivre une interprétation basée sur la « perfectibilité morale » qui se fonde sur les textes kantien. J'estime que cette deuxième interprétation peut se déduire de notre intérêt intellectuel pour la beauté naturelle, à la manière dont il est démontré dans la Critique de la faculté de juger de Kant. Enfin, après avoir examiné quelques objections, je me tournerai vers la contribution kantienne à l'éthique écologique : (a) sans prendre en considération son approche anthropocentrique, Kant ne subordonne pas la nature non humaine comme le fait le biocentrisme, et (b) bien que son approche puisse être désignée comme étant spéciste, Kant ne regarde pas la nature comme simple moyen – comme « capital naturel » ou comme « ressource naturelle » – mais la considère comme quelque chose de nécessaire pour notre perfectibilité morale.

Mots-clés

Emmanuel Kant, nature non humaine, devoirs, perfectibilité morale, beauté naturelle, subordination (apprivoisement)