

Moral Psych S 17

In the *Descent of Man*, Darwin writes,

“He who is forced to overcome his fear or want of sympathy before he acts, deserves, however, in one way higher credit than the man whose innate disposition leads him to a good act without effort. As we cannot distinguish between motives, we rank all actions of a certain class as moral, if performed by a moral being. A moral being is one who is capable of comparing his past and future actions or motives, and of approving or disapproving of them. We have no reason to suppose that any of the lower animals have this capacity; therefore, when a Newfoundland dog drags a child out of the water, or a monkey faces danger to rescue its comrade, or takes charge of an orphan monkey, we do not call its conduct moral. But in the case of man, who alone can with certainty be ranked as a moral being, actions of a certain class are called moral, whether performed deliberately, after a struggle with opposing motives, or impulsively through instinct, or from the effects of slowly-gained habit.”

Do you agree that humans are the only animals capable of acting morally and immorally? (Do you think that the rest of the animals are inappropriate “targets” of moral evaluation?) Which features must a person or animal have if we are appropriately hold them responsible for their actions by (e.g.) punishing them when they do wrong out of the belief that they *deserve* such punishment or rewarding them when they do something good out of the belief that they *deserve* such rewards? Is Darwin right that a “moral being” (understood here not as an entirely virtuous person, but as someone who is appropriately judged to deserve praise and blame) is “one who is capable of comparing his past and future actions or motives, and of approving or disapproving of them”? Must an animal have this trait if its actions are to be appropriately judged moral or immoral? How might someone support the claim that an animal must have this capacity for effective self-evaluation if it is to be properly evaluated in moral terms? Is this trait sufficient to render an animal a fit object of moral appraisal or might an animal who has it still lack some other necessary trait?

5-6 pages double-spaced, normal font and margins.

Assigned: 4/18/17

Due: 5/3/17