

BAXTER ON THE MORAL STATUS OF ANIMALS

I. Baxter's "Principles"

- A. *The "Spheres of Freedom" Principle*: "Every person should be free to do whatever he wishes in contexts where his actions do not interfere with the interests of other human beings."
- B. *The Waste Principle*: "Waste is bad."
- C. *The Kantian Principle*: "Every human being should be regarded as an end rather than as a means to be used for the betterment of another."
- D. *The "Means of Satisfaction" Principle*: "Both the incentive and the opportunity to improve his share of satisfactions should be preserved to every individual."

II. Baxter's arguments for these principles:

III. Critically evaluating the principles:

- A. *Spheres of Freedom Principle*:
 - 1. *'Interference'*: Interference is a notoriously problematic word. If it means 'makes someone else worse off', then the principle is extremely limited in its application. Many activities that we think are permissible make others worse off than they otherwise would be. Examples include: turning down a request for a date, competing with someone in business or sports, making choices about your life that others don't dislike, *etc.*
 - 2. *Limitation to Humans*: The limitation of the principle to effects on humans seems to allow animal abuse and neglect provided other people aren't affected.
 - B. *Waste Principle*: This is a truism. Some activity is called waste because it is an unproductive use of a valuable resource.
 - C. *Kantian Principle*: As Baxter uses this principle, it is just empty jargon. It has all the right buzzwords, but there is no attempt to suggest what it might actually require.
 - D. *Means of Satisfaction Principle*: Primarily, Baxter wants to argue against continuous redistribution of resources to maintain a completely egalitarian distribution, but in favor of redistribution to keep everyone from extreme deprivation. This is fine, I suppose, but since the latitude between these two extremes is wide indeed, the principle has almost no practical "bite" to it. Furthermore, virtually no one would disagree with it.
- IV. **Baxter's "Strategy"**: Baxter hopes to use these principles to defend his criteria for determining "optimal levels of pollution", which holds that it is only the interests of humans that count in determining these levels. Let's call this 'Baxter's Thesis' (BT).
- A. *Criticism*: This argumentative strategy is hopelessly flawed. To defend his position, Baxter would have to argue either:

1. that these moral principles *exhaust* the list of correct moral principles (so that we can conclude that there are no other principles that require us to consider the interests of non-human animals)
 - a) *Criticism:* Baxter doesn't even suggest a way of doing this. He apparently doesn't recognize the necessity of doing it.
2. that these principles, themselves, *require* us to ignore the interests of animals (as opposed to merely *not* requiring us to consider their interests)
 - a) *Criticism:* Again Baxter doesn't even attempt to do this and it seems obvious, on the face of it, that the principles do not require this.

V. Baxter's "Arguments" for Baxter's Thesis (BT)

- A. BT Corresponds to actual practice.
 1. *Criticism:* Correspondence to actual practice is *no* defense of a proposal.
- B. BT won't lead to any mass destruction of non-human flora and fauna.
 1. *Criticism:* If this consideration is supposed to be intrinsically relevant, then the following criticism of Baxter's next point is relevant here, too. It is this: If BT is true, then this is irrelevant. Therefore, if the theory is correct, this is no argument for it. Conversely, if this *is* a good argument for BT, then BT is false. If this consideration is not intrinsically relevant, then what is Baxter's point in raising it here?
- C. BT will generally lead to what is good for other species.
 1. *Criticism:* If BT is true, then this is irrelevant. Therefore, if the theory is correct, this is no argument for it. Conversely, if this *is* a good argument for BT, then BT is false.
- D. Baxter doesn't know how to do anything else.
 1. *Criticism:* The correct moral theory is not bound by Baxter's imagination (or lack of it).
- E. Non-human species cannot be regarded as ends in themselves because their preferences cannot be represented.
 1. *Criticism:* Baxter gives no argument that the preferences of non-human animals cannot be represented except to assert that *he* doesn't know how to do it, a point with which we should not argue. Furthermore, he gives no argument that representation of preferences is a necessary condition for being regarded as an end in oneself.
- F. "Questions of ought are unique to the human mind and world" (p. 145)
 1. *Criticism:* This confuses two distinct question of moral standing. The fact (if it is a fact) that "[q]uestions of 'ought' are unique to the human mind" shows, at most, that only humans are moral agents. It has no bearing on what sorts of things are moral patients. In other words, the fact that "[q]uestions of ought are unique to the human mind" does not show anything about what those questions of ought *apply to*.