

Hume and descartes critical thinking examples

[Environment](#), [Animals](#)



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The nature of animals and their rights have been a contentious topic for many philosophers. Animal nature has been a complex topic for researchers and scientists and provides a great opportunity for philosophers to come up with theories or concepts that help us understand animals better. It is based on the idea of animals being treated in the same manner as humans such on the basis of being conscious. However, most of the theories agree that animals should no longer be used for clothing, entertainment, research subjects, food, or property. Some of the greatest contributors in this topic include David Hume and Rene Descartes. Hence, the study compares Hume's and Descartes ideas on the status of animals, and how their views relate to reason, sense, and morals. Hume's and Descartes both offer differing theories on animal status, but it's the evidence on Hume's analogy or similarity concept that seems more realistic to that of Descartes.

Reason

The main question relating to the nature of animals is whether they are conscious or not as we humans are. Descartes was clearly against and denied the notion of animal consciousness. He argues that animals are

automata making them seem to be conscious of their actions, but are not conscious. Descartes believed animals were like machines, and their actions were automatic like the way machines operate (Thomas 337). Descartes developed the theory when mechanical views of nature were substituting the Aristotelian ideology that believed rationality is what separated animals from humans. This meant that unlike animals that have to choose how to live, humans have the ability to choose what is right. Descartes believed that animals cannot reason because they do not use language like humans, they only make sounds that are not from their imagination or consciousness, rather something they are reacting to like trying to get attention or food. However, humans can lie or speak from their imagination, they can argue, meaning they can reason and animals cannot.

In contrast, David Hume argues that animals and humans reason and act with the same consciousness through what he terms as a form of instinct. Hume's key works were based on animal reasoning, where he clearly supports animal reasoning and believes it is the same as that of humans (Beauchamp 322). Further, he argues with the concept that animals act unconsciously and are poor reasoning because most animal behaviors are similar to those of humans. Hume also adds that animal reasoning is different in some way to that of humans because animal reasoning is designed to develop certain instincts, such as; reproduction and feeding behaviors. This concept of similarity was known as analogy, which argued that animals also associate with ideas in their minds just like humans act consciously. Based on the idea on analogy, his argument on animal reasoning and thought presented indisputable proof that animals are similar

to humans even though the similarity is not perfect, thus they may also be conscious as human beings. Furthermore, his sympathy and procedural commitment to empirical reflection makes sense of animals acting consciously like humans. Unlike Descartes' concept of animals acting as machines, Hume clearly proves that animals are in thought and reason similar to humans, but with different reasons or thought.

Contrary to Hume' concept of analogy and animals reasoning the same as humans, Descartes argues that he expects reasoning, if valid to animal conduct, to apply equally to human behavior. His mechanistic or automatic argument of behavior is not valid for humans because of two reasons. One is that humans have the capability to behave in a novel and complex manner. Such novel and complex behavior does not occur from simple responses to inducements, but instead occurs from human reasoning of the world as he sees it. Second is the human ability to speak in a way that expresses thought. Furthermore, he claims that only human beings can involve in the kind of expression that is impulsive and articulates thought.

Sense

Sense can be defined as the ability to feel, see, smell, or taste that is related to the function of the mind similar to a physical perception of something. This relates to the question whether animals have sense or they are automatic and do not require senses to live. In Descartes theory of automata, he argues that animals act like machines pre-programmed or set to act in a certain manner throughout. This means that they have no sense or the ability to perceive something and understand its meaning just like the way a human has a sense of humor an animal cannot. His argument is aimed

at proving animals are not the same as humans since they act automatically and have no reasoning (Thomas 346).

Descartes does not believe that senses are what contribute to knowledge, it's our mind that has the ability to perceive and not senses such feeling or seeing. Up against this argument, Hume also acknowledges that senses cannot contribute to knowledge, but it's through experience, that is learned through those senses that contributes to knowledge. Hume argues that animal and human behavior are similar, and most of the similarities are based on senses. Through instincts, animals can feel hungry or other perceptions even from outside subjects or objects (Beauchamp 327). For instance, most animals have an instinct for danger and are most likely to sense danger that is most likely to be there. This alone has a lot to prove that animals have a sense, but their senses are limited in nature and so is their knowledge. Human senses are more complex and can recognize more things than that of animals; for instance the sense of humor, which cannot mean that humor, is perceived in the mind, it's heard or seen through senses and decoded as humor. Hume argues that their ability to sense is limited to their interrelation with other animals, unlike humans who are at the top of things and almost relate to everything.

Nevertheless, Descartes explained his mechanical argument on the basis of sense organs, muscles, and brain that accounted for their functions (Thomas 356). He believed animals had sensitive souls or spirits that act in the same manner as the brains of human beings, and send signals to the sensory system causing muscle movement. He continues to state that the animal spirits occur or act in the same manner as the brains' reaction to an

incoming object that results in running for cover, is the same way spirits function, which does not require any reasoning or brain activity just like machines can be set or directed to do. Moreover, the idea of animals being mechanical and acting automatically does not make sense, after all Hume's explanation of analogy is more sensible and has some realistic truth to it.

Moral

In Hume's explanation of animal nature, he divides animal reasoning in moral and demonstrative reasoning, which he clearly defines as to have distance, contiguity, causation, and distance. He explains that the relations of contrariety, resemblance, and extent in quality are exposed by perception rather than demonstration or illustration that he argues in his analogy ideology. Hume concludes that moral reasoning is based on 3 arguments; that existence is based on cause and effect; knowledge of the cause and effect is learnt through experience. Having morality is what Hume sees to make animal and man different. However, the phrase having morality may be understood in different ways such as the making of moral judgments or having a sense of moral value. He believes animals cannot make any moral decisions of others behavior or of their own.

Meanwhile, Descartes argued on the basis of beings with souls and beings without souls. He believed only humans have souls among all earthly beings or creatures. Descartes integrated the soul with the mind and argued that animals cannot reason without a soul and mind. Souls relate with volition and intellection, consisting of conscious memories, conscious experiences, and images. He viewed animals and their behavior as machines and how they function, meaning that they neither have consciousness or any mind for

reasoning. However, Descartes could not provide proof that animals acted as machines, but could still behave like humans in some ways because all animals have a certain degree of similarity to humans in terms of behavior and other features.

Descartes believed that animal behavior could be explained mechanically and there was no way an animal could act consciously based on some elements of thought. For instance, the expression of one's thought through speech was his main argument in animal thinking or reasoning (Thomas 343). This same argument applied to animals having any ability to think morally or act in a moral manner. Animals and humans are different species and humans beings are the only creatures with souls; they can only be moral beings. Descartes' argument on animals and machinery concludes that they have no choice or moral reasoning and have strictly set reasons or lives to live, but humans have a mind that enables them determine what is wrong and what is right.

In conclusion, Hume and Descartes seem to differ more on their respective positions concerning animal nature. Animals have encountered many challenges and difficulties in the past where there was no regard at all and were just thought of as food, property, clothes, and other things that were not justified. When people look at animal behavior and see a similarity in them, it means they have a close if not similar relation or characteristic, and should both respect each other and avoid discrimination or anguish.

Balanced against Descartes explanation on the nature of animals as being mechanical, Hume's argument makes more sense and is more realistic.

Although this may be true, it still requires more proof that even Descartes

was not able to accomplish before his death. Hume concludes that animals have a mind and can reason, but have no moral reasoning while Descartes concludes that animals cannot reason at any one time and cannot make any moral judgments or have any morality.

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