

motivations. This idea has a prominent role in several major moral traditions, most obviously the tradition inspired by Kant. For example, Christine Korsgaard, a prominent Kantian who has explicitly applied Kant's ideas to the question of whether animals can act morally, writes:

“Kant believed that human beings have developed a specific form of self-consciousness, namely, the ability to perceive, and therefore to think about, the grounds of our beliefs and actions

A dog has no control over its motivations

as grounds. Here's what I mean: an animal who acts from instinct is conscious of the objects of its fear or desire, and conscious of it as fearful or desirable, and so as to-be-avoided or to-be-sought. That is the ground of its action. But a rational animal is, in addition, conscious that she fears or desires the object, and that she is inclined to act in a certain way as a result. That's what I mean by being conscious of the ground as a ground. So as rational beings we are conscious of the principles on which we are inclined to act. Because of this, we have the ability to ask ourselves whether we should act in the way we are instinctively inclined to. We can say to ourselves: ‘I am inclined to do act-A for the sake of end-E. But should I?’”

We find a cognate idea in the, otherwise very different, Aristotelian tradition. In a famous passage in the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle writes:

“But for actions in accord with the virtues to be done transparently or justly it does not suffice that they themselves have the right qualities. Rather, the agent must also be in the right state

when he does them. First he must know that he is doing virtuous actions; second, he must decide on them, and decide on them for themselves; and, third, he must also do them from a firm and unchanging state.”

For an action to be virtuous, it must not simply be an example of what would commonly be regarded as a virtuous action (have the “right qualities”). In addition, the agent must (a) know that he is performing a virtuous action, and (b) perform the action because it is a virtuous action (“decide on them for themselves”). In other words, to act virtuously, you need to understand what a virtue is and act in the way that you do because you want to be virtuous.

The general idea, therefore, is that to act morally, we need to be able to scrutinise our motivations, understand whether or not they are morally good or bad, and act on them – or refuse to act on them – on this basis. If animals lack these abilities, they cannot act morally, and it seems likely they lack these abilities. Did the apparently heroic dog think to itself: “I am inclined to drag my companion to safety. Is this an inclination I should act on or one that I should resist?” Or, if we imagined the dog as an Aristotelian: “Would this be a virtuous thing to do?” According to (many) philosophers, it is not simply that the dog *did* not engage in this sort of scrutiny of its motivation that is important. What is crucial is that it *cannot* do this – it lacks the ability to scrutinise its motivations. Often, we act unreflectively too – dashing into burning buildings to save babies, and things like that, without a thought to the consequences. But the difference, philosophers say, is that we can scrutinise our motivations even if, in particular cases, we do not. Therefore, philosophical orthodoxy has it: (i) lacking the ability to