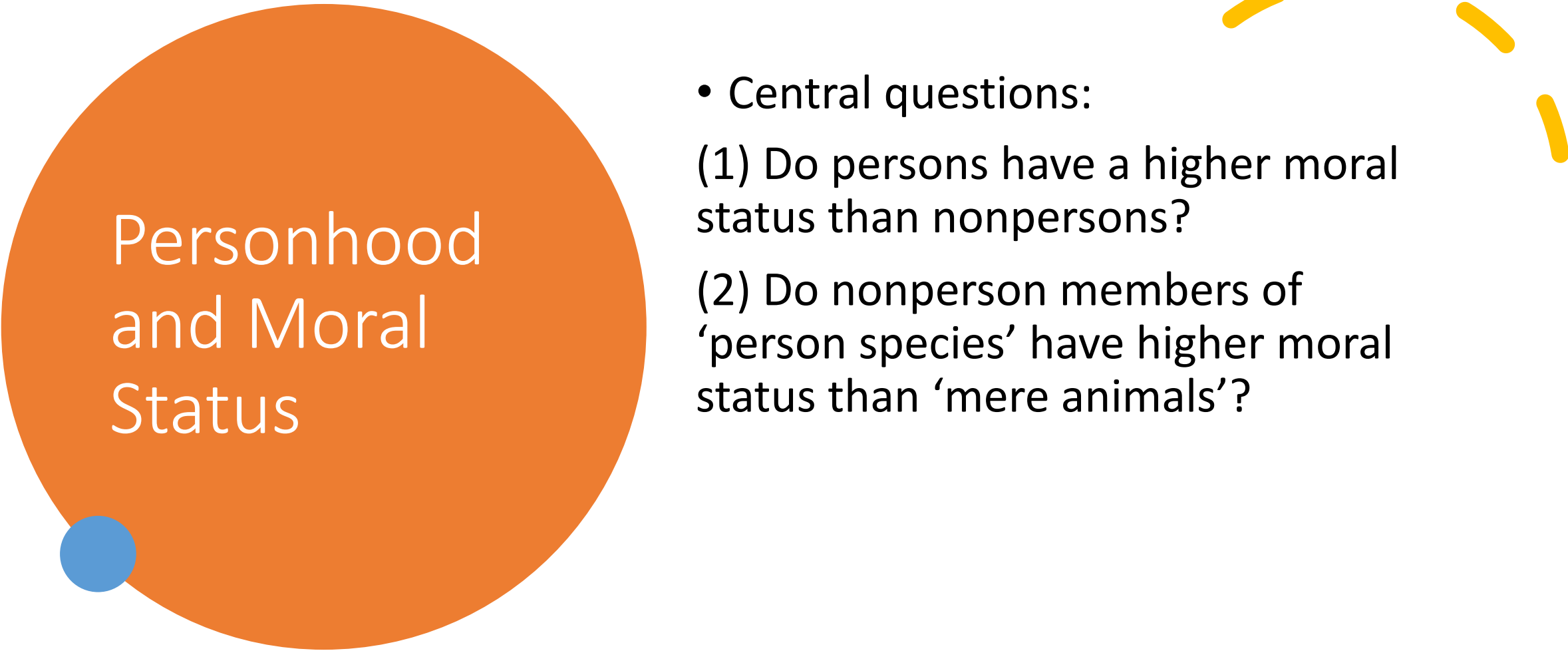


Recap

- Moral standing/moral considerability – a morally considerable being is one that matters for its own sake. It can be wronged by our actions
- Interests: things that make a being's life go better or worse
- The weight (or strength) of an interest is determined by how much the satisfaction of that interest contributes to the welfare of the individual who holds it
- ECI – the principle that like interests must be considered equally
- Speciesism – a prejudice based on species?

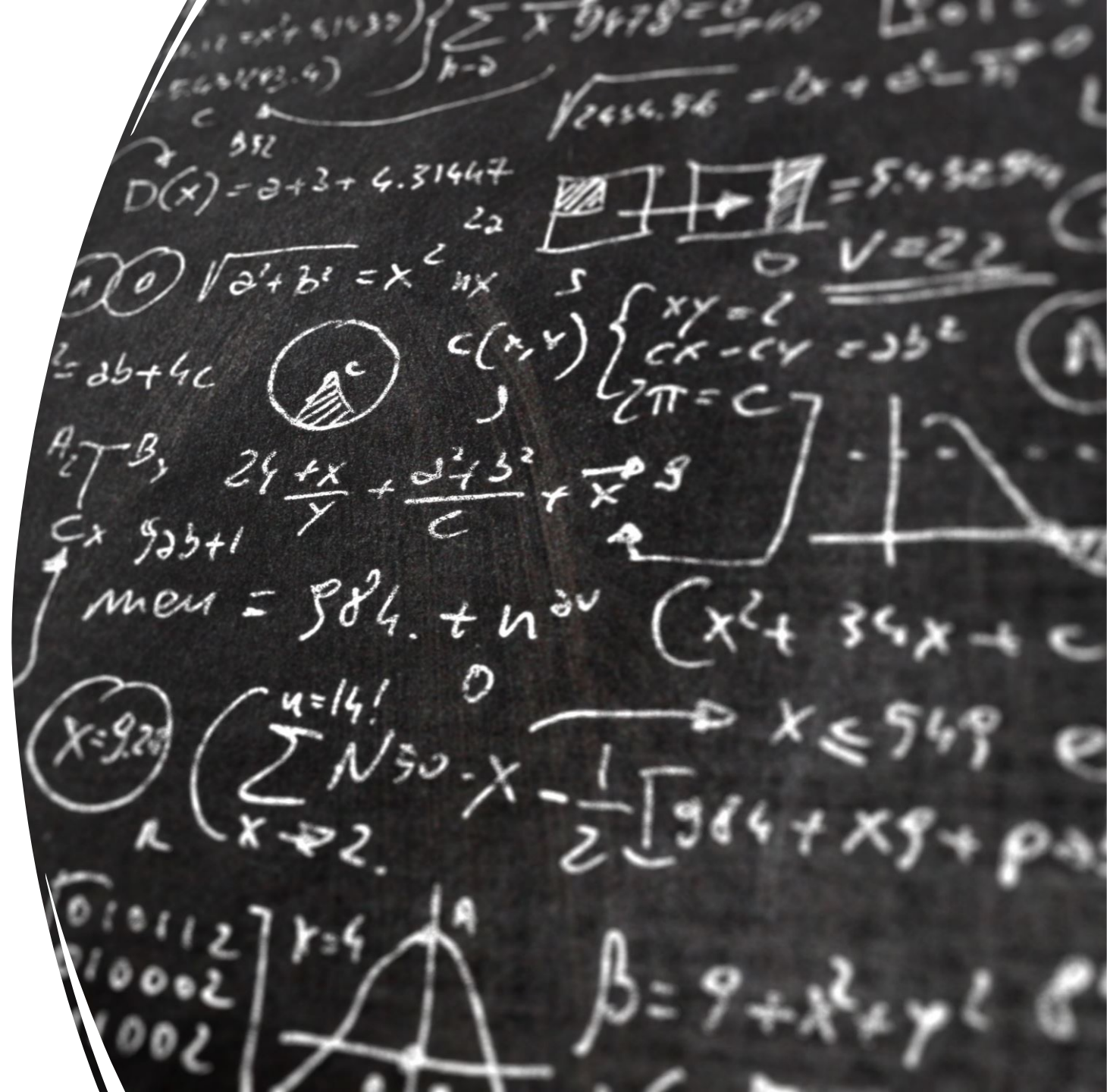


Personhood and Moral Status

- Central questions:
 - (1) Do persons have a higher moral status than nonpersons?
 - (2) Do nonperson members of 'person species' have higher moral status than 'mere animals'?

Lecture plan

- (1) What is a person?
- (2) What do we mean by moral status?
- (3) Shelly Kagan's 'Modal Personhood'



What is a person?



RATIONALITY



SELF-AWARENESS



TEMPORAL
CONTINUITY



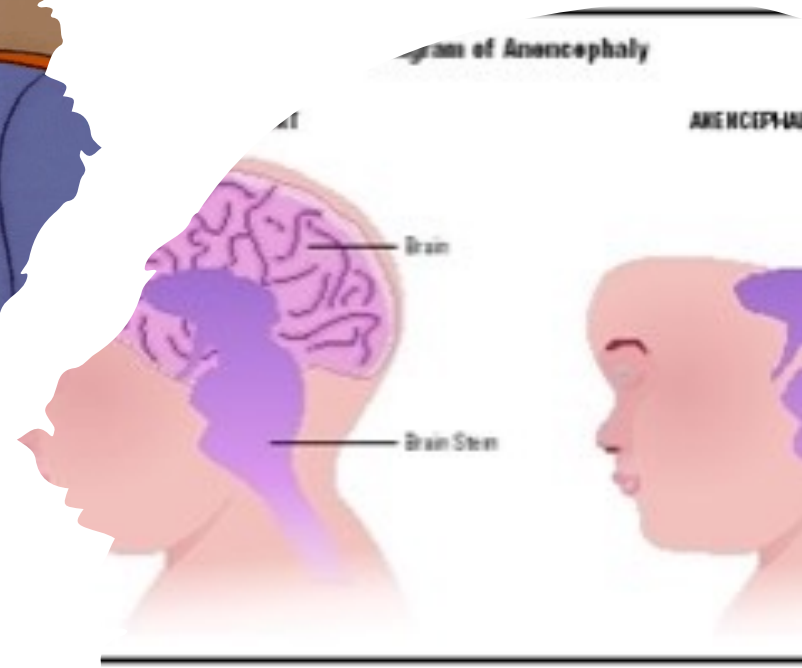
MORAL
RESPONSIBILITY

Normative beings?

- A lower animal's attention is fixed on the world. Its perceptions are its beliefs and its desires are its will. It is engaged in conscious activities, but it is not conscious of them. That is, they are not the objects of its attention. But we human animals turn our attention on to our perceptions and desires themselves, on to our own mental activities, and we are conscious of them. That is why we can think about them...And this sets us a problem that no other animal has. It is the problem of the normative.... The reflective mind cannot settle for perception and desire, not just as such. It needs a reason. (Korsgaard 1996: 93)

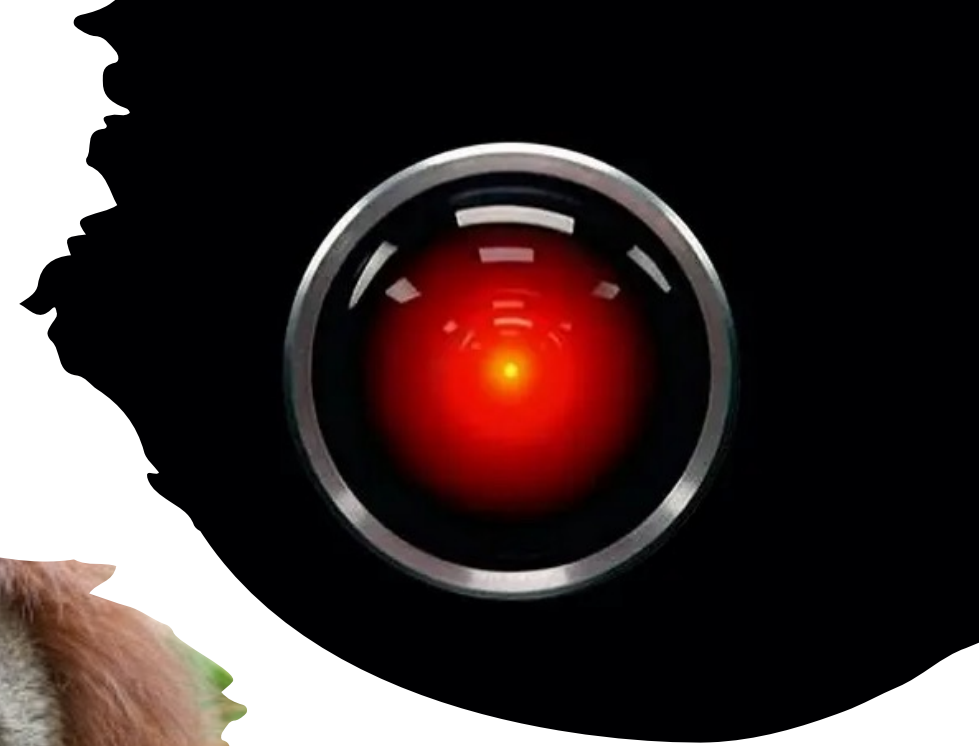
Not all humans are persons...

- Infants aren't persons yet
- The severely senile aren't persons anymore
- The severely cognitively impaired (e.g. anencephalic infants) will never be persons



...and not all persons are humans

- Intelligent aliens?
- AI/Robots?
- Other terrestrial animals?



Why might persons have a higher moral status than nonpersons?

More valuable lives?

Reciprocity?

A wider variety of interests?

A higher capacity for wellbeing?

Something intrinsically valuable about exercise of higher cognitive faculties?

What does it mean to have a higher moral status?

- Compatible with ECI: something about persons makes it the case that their interests usually weigh more than those of nonpersons
- Incompatible with ECI: equally weighty interests count for more when held by persons rather than nonpersons
- Moral status just a synonym for moral standing?
- Relevance?
- How to maintain the equality of all persons?

Two alternatives

Personism - higher moral status for persons

+ Intuitively plausible?

+ Makes sense of some common moral intuitions

-Violates ECI

-Theoretically complex

-Doesn't allow us to say that all humans have equal moral status

Unitarianism – all sentient beings have equal moral status

+ Theoretically simple

+ Compatible with ECI

+All humans (and all sentient beings) have equal MS

- Counter intuitive?

- Vulnerable to counterexamples?



Modal Personhood

Kagan (2016) 'What's Wrong With
Speciesism?'

(1) Most people aren't speciesists –
we are *modal personists*

(2) Modal Personism is a defensible
moral position

Not speciesists but personists?

- We seem to care about (fictional) nonhuman persons such as Superman and ET. Does this show that we actually value persons rather than homo sapiens?

“the position most of us endorse doesn’t draw the relevant line between humans and other animals, but rather between persons and other animals”
(p.10)



Not personists but modal personists?

“In fact, however, the view that I think most of us accept goes considerably beyond this. For the fact is, we give favorable treatment not only to persons, but also to humans who are not, and perhaps may never be, persons.” (p.11)

Painful experiment case seems to show that we care more about nonperson members of ‘person species’ than we do about mere animals



Challenges for modal personhood

- Impaired Martian dogs
- Compare with impaired Martian children



The plague objection

- Imagine a plague makes it the case that human beings are no longer capable of becoming persons. Does this mean that humanity isn't a person species, and so impaired humans aren't modal persons after all?
- “The relevant question is not the statistical one of what most members of the species are like, but rather what the generic member of the species is like. The generic lion has hair, even if some disease leaves most lions bald. Similarly, the generic human is a person—even if some disease leaves few of us that way” (p.14)



Why is membership of a person species important?

- One is a member of (infinitely?) many groups. Why is species membership morally relevant?
- Rabbit member of philosophy club case



A metaphysical fact

“The answer that seems attractive to me is that membership in a natural group normally tells us something about the nature of the individual member, while membership in an artificial group typically does not” (p.15)

“In short, I am suggesting that what seems to matter in its own right is not the biological fact that a given creature is a member of a person species, but rather the metaphysical fact which normally follows from this, namely, that the creature could have been a person”



Two anencephaly cases

- Case 1: Anencephaly caused by genetic abnormalities mean that this particular individual never could have been a person.
- Case 2: Anencephaly caused by abnormal development in utero mean that this individual could have been a person.

Does the former lack the higher moral status accorded to the latter? Is this plausible? Is it fair?



Challenges for Modal Personism

- Why should the fact that some being *could have been* a person raise their moral status? Modal field goal analogy (DeGrazia, 2016)
- Could animals be made into persons by some form of enhancement? And if so are they then modal persons too?



Some exam questions to discuss

- 2020: Q 20. If you cannot save both, ought you to save a healthy adult pig loved by all or a healthy infant human being for whom no one feels any affection?
- 2018: Q 19. 'Intuitively, the interests of a being who could have been a person count for more than those of a mere animal. And this is no mere prejudice.' Are these claims true?
- 2021: Q 8. If we were to coexist with a new generation of genetically enhanced human beings whose psychological capacities would exceed our own by almost as much as ours exceed those of chimpanzees, would they have a higher moral status than we have or would we be their moral equals? Does your answer have any implications for our moral relation to other animals?
- 2019: Q 10. What, if anything, is the moral significance of the fact that an individual is a member of a species in which personhood is the norm?