

Bioethics & Animals (Spring 2013)

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**Reflections on
Animal Pain & Suffering**

Forms of Animal Advocacy

- ⦿ Anti-cruelty
 - ⦿ Pro-welfare
- Reformist

- ⦿ Liberation ——— Revolutionary

- “demands an expansion of our moral horizons and an extension or reinterpretation of the basic moral principle of equality” (Singer 17)



In Peter Singer's Words...

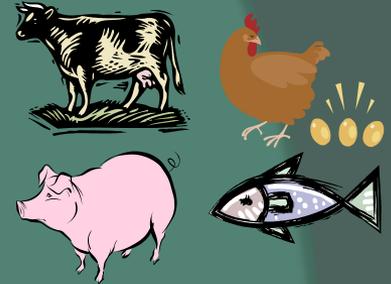


- Video: On animal equality
- Equality movements look for “common denominator” in humanity
 - But those features and capacities will be shared by non-humans...
- What do you think the moral principle of equality requires?
 - How important is equality in comparison to other moral goals?



Speciesism

- ⦿ “If we ignore or discount their interests *simply* on the grounds that they are not members of our species” (*The Ethics of What We Eat* 246)
- ⦿ If we do not take differences in capacity seriously for determining moral status in our own species, then we should not take them serious cross-species
- ⦿ To avoid speciesism:
Give equal consideration to comparable interests

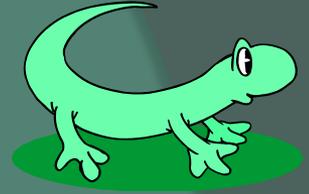


Why Sentience?

- ⦿ Determines the boundaries of moral status
- ⦿ Foundational capacity and interest
 - “pre-requisite for having interests at all” (Singer 20)
 - Pain as intrinsically evil, pleasure intrinsically good
- ⦿ No matter what else a sentient being desires or wants, it will seek pleasure and avoid pain.

More on Singer's Views

- Hedonistic calculus most appropriate for animals that a) have capacity for pleasure/pain but b) do not have capacity for self-consciousness (preferences)



- Preference calculus most appropriate for self-conscious animals—i.e., those capable of projects/goals/desires (most mammals?)



- Animals *without* preferences are *replaceable*—permissible to replace unhappy, non-self-conscious animal with happy animal
- Self-conscious animals are *irreplaceable*—“When a being with future-oriented desires dies, those desires remain unsatisfied even if another being is brought into existence and has similar desires satisfied” (explained in Varner, pg. 101)

Controversial Implications

- “If the experimenter is not prepared to use an orphaned human infant, then his readiness to use non-humans is simple discrimination” (22)
- Should cease most animal experimentation
- Should revolutionize food production and eating habits (small- and large-scale)

Pain vs. Suffering

◎ Pain

- Relatively simple mental and physiological state

◎ Suffering

- Requires self- and time-awareness
- “they must be able to anticipate and remember pain; and they must recognize that their desires or goals will be frustrated by pain” (Akhtar 498)

◎ What is the moral import of this distinction?

- Do you agree with the traditional definitions of these terms?

The Effect of Pain of Animal Welfare

- ◉ When a creature only has a few interests, each of those interests carries a great deal of weight in determining overall well-being.
- ◉ “Animals without a sense of self and time are not able to choose to endure pain for the sake of satisfying long-term interests, and there is no global or higher order perspective to consider” (Akhtar 505)
- ◉ Might be mentally imprisoned in the present, painful state → intensity of pain not mitigated or eased by hope
- ◉ If animal has rudimentary sense of self and time, then suffering might be the most acute.
 - Anticipation and memory of pain without ability to discount it

Humans' Discounting of Pain

- ⦿ Humans have long-term, higher order, and global interests
- ⦿ Capable of **inter-temporal interest calculation**
 - “assigning weight of value to one’s different interests and concerns across time, including discounting some of them or valuing them less, and formulating trade-offs among them” (Akhtar 502)
- ⦿ Pain can be lessened in intensity and in weight by
 - focusing attention elsewhere,
 - shifting perspectives,
 - understanding reasons for pain,
 - expecting and understanding the duration of pain
 - Situating pain experience within context of other interests

Discussion Questions

- Has Singer provided a convincing argument that speciesism is as problematic as racism or sexism?
- Do you think that Singer dismisses dignity arguments too quickly?
- What normative conclusions can we draw from Akhtar's discussion of pain and suffering?

Additional References

- ◎ Peter Singer's personal site, which includes updated information on his views:
<http://www.princeton.edu/~psinger/>
- ◎ *The Ethics of What We Eat* by Peter Singer & Jim Mason
- ◎ "Can Animal Rights Activists be Environmentalists?" by Gary Varner

Questions? Comments?