All Animals are Equal by Peter Singer

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Peter Singer and animal rights

**Ethical** and **philosophical** perspective

**Utilitarian**: the doctrine that actions are right if they are useful or for the benefit of a majority.

- One entity, from the point of view of the universe, is no more good/valuable than another.
Equality: *Looking to the oppressed past...*

**Racism/Sexism**

1. *NORM: Slavery regarded as “natural” superiority/inferiority*

2. Pejorative terms for minorities

3. Differences between women/men, black/white

**Animal abuse**

1. *NORM: Eating and experimenting animals*

2. Calling them “animals” isolates humans as civilized and superior

3. We shouldn’t TREAT groups equally (i.e. giving a pig the right to vote), but we should consider their rights in the same way
How should we judge equality?

Among Humans

- Moral Idea
- Distinct from judgments of “intelligence, moral capacity, physical strength, or similar matters of fact.”
- A philosophy on how we should treat all other humans
- Interests
- Capacity for suffering
- NOT
  - Intelligence
  - Moral capability
  - Strength
  - Any attribute
Why is it wrong to have a bias for our species?

Humans...

1. Can live the “good life”
2. Capacity to suffer
3. Inherent ‘dignity’ of humans
4. Ability to rationalize (voting)

Counterargument

1. “every sentient being is capable of leading a life that is happier or less miserable than some alternative life”. Behavior of some animals show emotional expression.
2. Adult apes, cats, mammals are aware and sensitive to pain
3. Humanist thinkers prioritize humans based on Judeo-Christian values
4. We should equally CONSIDER them
IF WE HOLD NON-HUMAN ANIMALS IN ANOTHER REALM OF RESPECT, WE ARE SPECIESISTS.
“Most humans are *speciesists*”

- Eating them as most common form of contact
  - Objectified and only valued economically, within the market system
  - Singer would call this a trivial interest (we can eat soy instead…)
  - Even calling them “animals” arbitrarily distinguishes humans from other animals in an US vs. THEM mentality
- Modern philosophers have not challenged the prevailing ideology and thus not extended rights’ language to non-humans
- Why do we continue to accept/perpetuate this “injustice” according to Singer?
Questions for discussion

- What separates humans from non-humans?
  - Consciousness?
  - What about mentally disabled humans?
  - Dignity?

- Would be "unfair" to use an imbecile or orphan infant for medical research instead of a dog?

- Can a weighing of considered interests help solve this dilemma of injustice?

- Singer often mentions mammals (pigs, apes, cats, etc.) in his arguments. Would Singer want us to extend rights to other non-sentient beings such as bacteria, plants or rocks?

- Should we try to minimize all suffering in our dealings with animals?