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### Animal Exploitation: The Tyranny of Human Greed

Animals have long had a place in human history as resources and assets, be it for food, travel, clothing, or agriculture. Their history is one of continued exploitation as man became more adept in finding ways to market animal capital. So when asked to create a chart of what separates us from our non-human counterparts, the differences at first seem obvious. Humans have uncontested intellect, the ability to emote, complex social structures, a concept of time and history, and high levels of oral and written communication. But do these qualities really apply to all humans? How about infants, innocently unaware of their own existence, or those mentally disabled, who cannot communicate as freely as others? How about the elephant, who grieves over the death of a friend, or the dolphin, who lives in a social network nearly as complex as our own? Are their rights invalidated because of their species? Simply put, all animals, including us humans, have varying levels of rationality and sentience. Philosopher Peter Singer makes these arguments in his book *Animal Liberation*. To give humans more authority simply because they are human is what he considers ‘speciesism’, “a form of favouritism for our own that is as unjustifiable as racism.”<sup>1</sup> In discussions of animal rights, a controversial issue is whether certain kinds of animals, depending on their level of “humanness”, should be prioritized and treated with “special rights”. While some argue for these special rights, especially in our close cousins the primates, others such as Peter Singer argue that such a view is speciesist. I believe in Singer’s views concerning speciesism; that no animals should be given priority just on the basis of their humanness. But I also believe that as human beings, whose primary interests lay in furthering

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Singer, “Animal Liberation or Animal Rights?” In *The Animals Reader*, ed. L. Kalof & A. Fitzgerald. New York: Berg Books, 2007, p. 15.

the quality of our lives just as other animals feel for themselves, must be allowed some degree of authority over our animal counterparts.

Human greed easily corrupts what rights animals have. So is there a way to fairly ‘exploit’ animals so as to benefit both parties? We should be allowed to use animals as a source of food and nourishment, just as carnivorous animals do to others. However, a standard needs to be met so as for an animal to flourish at ‘full capability’, a term Nussbaum elaborates on in *The Moral Status of Animals*. She states; “The fact that so many animals never get to move around, enjoy the air, exchange affection with other members of their kind — all that is a waste and a tragedy, and it is not a life in keeping with the *dignity* of such creatures.”<sup>2</sup> Factory farms and slaughterhouses grossly neglect the natural tendencies and freedoms of animals in the meat market such as cows, pigs, and chickens. I propose harsher laws to allow free range lifestyles for these animals, in which animals and humans could coexist in some type, if not slightly imbalanced harmony. They also must be killed painlessly, with as much dignity as possible. This in turn would raise meat prices, causing a societal shift towards more plant based diets, consequently reducing the meat market as a whole. Of course, when the rights of a human are endangered by a lack of food, if ‘exploiting’ animals is the only practical way to feed oneself and their family, consuming animal products is justifiable. This would be put in the category of ‘furthering the quality of our lives’, and to take away a source of food would be hypocritically be to take away the rights of human beings.

Jeremy Bentham states in his famous essay *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* “...the question is not, Can they reason? nor, Can they talk? but, Can they suffer?” Animal testing, another issue of animal exploitation and speciesism, has been repeatedly

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<sup>2</sup> Martha Nussbaum, “The Moral Status of Animals.” In *The Animals Reader*, ed. L. Kalof & A. Fitzgerald. New York: Berg Books, 2007. p. 33.

defended as being beneficial by helping saving human lives. Even in this defense it's impossible to exclude the fact that hundreds of thousands of animals had their lives cut premature in cruel and unusual ways. Just as another perfectly healthy human wouldn't be willing to sacrifice themselves to testing for the "greater good" of humanity, so wouldn't a standardly healthy non-human animal. Testing can be done smarter. Animals are not always tested for medicinal purposes, they often go through it to help corporations market material things such as cosmetic products or foods. Animal testing should not be marketable and a part of business culture. In matters of medicine it should be available but used sparingly; in this matter I agree with Singer's utilitarian perspective on the issue and disagree with philosopher Tom Regan, who believes it is not justified in stating "Animals do not belong in laboratories because placing them there, in the hope of benefits for others, violates their rights."<sup>3</sup> If the benefits outweigh harms (taking both human and animal rights into consideration) it can be used. Just as for the meat market however there must be limitations placed on how the animals are raised so as to let them live naturally as possible.

To conclude, it is possible for animals and humans to live in a more balanced harmony. In matters of the survival of our own human species, some kind of authority should be exerted to promote the healthiness and happiness of the population. However with the way things are aligned in society today, animal exploitation has gone beyond simply meeting human survival-needs. Industry has become a mechanized killing force to animals, one that views them as mere capital assets and doesn't recognize them as sentient beings just like us. In all regards of life, the ones who cannot speak for themselves are the ones who should be defended to the highest degree.

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<sup>3</sup> Tom Regan, "The Rights of Humans and Other Animals." In *The Animals Reader*, ed. L. Kalof & A. Fitzgerald. New York: Berg Books, 2007. p. 23.

## **Works Cited**

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