

Animal Ethics

Peter Singer, “All animals are equal” (1989)

Peter Singer

- Australian moral philosopher
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Stat Shot

- What does it tell us?
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“All animals are equal”

- Are all animals equal?
 - Why not?
 - Why is there the prevalence of “speciesism” in our worldview?
- Campaigns for equality against discrimination and liberation movements
 - Can you think of some of these?
- What is the principle behind liberation movements?
 - PoE

Singer's objective

- To extend the PoE to species other than our own
- Differences and equality
 - Do differences between groups hamper the sharing of equal rights between them?
- Argues for the equality of consideration
 - Why?
- *“We will then see that we would be on shaky ground if we were to demand equality for blacks, women, and other groups of oppressed humans while denying equal consideration to nonhumans”*

- When it is said that all human beings are equal, what is it that is being asserted?
 - Not that all humans are ‘factually equal’—there are individual differences
 - But equality of different races and sexes
- Singer: *“This is a possible line of objection to racial and sexual discrimination. It is not, however, the way that someone really concerned about equality would choose, because taking this line could, in some circumstances, force one to accept a most inegalitarian society.”*
 - Ponder: Why?

Argument from absurd implications

- *“The existence of individual variations that cut across the lines of race or sex, however, provides us with no defense at all against a more sophisticated opponent of equality”*
 - Tying the moral principle of equality to the factual equality of different groups does not provide us with any basis for objecting to sophisticated kinds of inegalitarianism
- *“The principle of the equality of human beings is not a description of an alleged actual equality among humans: it is a prescription of how we should treat humans.”*
 - What does it mean to say that equality is a moral ideal, and not a simple assertion of fact
 - Description vs. prescription

Utilitarian principle

- Jeremy Bentham
 - *“Each to count for one and none for more than one”*
- Henry Sidgwick
 - *“The good of any one individual is of no more importance, from the point of view (if I may say so) of the Universe, than the good of any other.”*
- Principle of equal consideration of interests
 - Equal consideration to everyone’s interests!
 - Hence speciecism must be condemned

Bentham's Question

- “The question is not, can they *reason*? Nor, can they *talk*? But, can they *suffer*?”
- Suffering as the vital characteristic that gives a being the right to equal consideration.
- Capacity for suffering and enjoyment
 - The prerequisite for having interests at all!
 - Makes ‘interest-talk’ meaningful in the first place!
- “No matter what the nature of the being, the principle of equality requires that its suffering be counted equally with the like suffering—in so far as rough comparisons can be made—of any other being.”

Speciesism of Humans

- Are we speciesists??
 - In what ways?
- Specieicism against non-human animals
 - Meat eating as treating animals as means to our ends.
 - Singer: No defense of eating flesh in terms of satisfying nutritional needs.
 - See The Game Changers (Louie Psihoyos, 2018)
- Singer:
 - *“The suffering we inflict on the animals while they are alive is perhaps an even clearer indication of our speciesism than the fact that we are prepared to kill them....a clear instance of the sacrifice of the most important interests of other beings in order to satisfy trivial interests of our own.”*

Forms of speciecism

- Experimenting
- Eating
- Philosophizing!
 - Problem of equality: PoE = human equality
 - Failure of philosophy to challenge accepted beliefs
- The prescriptive notion of equality makes it difficult to exclude non-humans from the sphere of equality
 - How so?

Human equality, with animal inequality

- William Frankena, “The concept of social justice”
 - *“all men are to be treated as equals, not because they are equal, in any respect, but simply because they are human.”*
- Singer’s counterpoint
 - Animals have emotions and desires
 - Continuum between humans and non-humans
- Singer’s critique of Stanley Benn’s “Egalitarianism and equal consideration of interests”
 - Which argues for equal consideration of only human interests
 - Why should there be any fundamental inequality of claims between a dog and a human imbecile?
 - Falling victim to a prevailing ideology!

What do you think?

- Agree/disagree with Singer?
- What is Singer's meta-ethical foundation?
- What are the other ethical domains this argument applies to?

Watch/Listen

- **Watch**

- *Ship of Theseus* (Anand Gandhi, 2012)
- *Earthlings* (Shaun Monson, 2005)
- *The Cove* (Louie Psihoyos, 2009)
- *The Game Changers* (Louie Psihoyos, 2018)
- *The Examined Life* (Astra Taylor, 2008)

Read:

- Peter Singer, “All animals are equal”
- Tom Regan, “The case for animal rights”