

Sichun Xu

PHI 197

11/16/2018

We should consider all animals equal

In our society, most cultivated animals are treated as products, which will be produced for whatever humans need in daily life. When people are discussing animals, they always prefer our species' interests as first place. In the reading, Singer argues that "all animals are equal", which means we should take equal considerations to all animals. Though Singer's view is controversial among the world, it is still valid and persuasive.

In order to explain to his main claims -- the principle of equality, Singer gives several discussions. First, the demand of being equal is not the ask for actual equal for all humans. Some people argue that though individuals are different, there are similarities, actually equalities, between races and gender. We cannot know anything about an individual's intellectual and moral abilities and capacities by individuals' genders and races. Though these claims partially show why racism and sexism are wrong. However, it acquiesced a further situation against the principle of equality. That is, in the same group, individuals that are clever should be authorized more rights than those who have poor IQ. Moreover, we can't guarantee that ability and capacities are well-distributed. The difference between races and sexes seems to exist, and we cannot tell whether genetic

factors or environmental factors contribute to it. To sum up, the principle of equality of humans is not related to humans' ability and capacity. It is, as Singer says, an instruction for the ways we treat other humans.

Then, as Singer discusses above about the principle of equality of humans, we can find that the principle can be extended to the region of all animals. In *Animal Liberation*, the capacity of suffering is considered as the moral equality among species. It is the necessary requirement to obtain our equal consideration. As almost all animals have the capacity of suffering, non-human animals have the right to obtain our equal consideration. So, the claim "all animals are equal" means that all the animals' interests should be considered equally. In contrast with this idea, according to Singer, "speciesism is a prejudice or attitude of bias in favor of the interests of members of one's own species and against those of members of other species" (*Animal Liberation*, page 8). It suggests that speciesism claims to place the right of their own species first. As we should take equal consideration to others, which are not related to their appearance and abilities, we sum up that racism and sexism are wrong. Similarly, we can blame the speciesism that as higher-intelligence person can't exploit a poor-intelligence person, we can't exploit animals based on different intelligence and abilities.

However, the claim that we should equally consider non-human animals' interest doesn't mean we should treat all species equally. If we treat all species equally, it means all species have the same rights, that implies the actual equality

among all species which is conflicted with reality—there are differences between species. Instead, though we should consider all animals' interests equally, it doesn't show that we should treat them in a same way. In Singer's words, there are differences between groups, and because different groups have different biological or intellectual abilities, it's meaningless to ask for specifically equal rights for all groups. For example, it's a waste of time to fight for man's right to have abortion for man cannot be pregnant. And the same for a pig's right to vote, because a pig cannot think rationally.

Since we understand the principle of equality for all animals, we will find out that our current ways to treat animals bring them misery, and much of them are inefficient to "trade" for human's pleasure. So, in order to avoid animals' suffering, we should revise our current practice, at least reduce some inefficient "trade" (the sacrifice of death of animals to human pleasure). For example, we should change our diet to eat more vegetables instead of meat; we should stop trapping elephants and eagles to decorate ourselves.

There are several objections towards Singer's viewpoint. First, some scholars argue that though some humans are vegetarians, most of human-beings need meat. The claim about decreasing the amount of killing animals for food restricts their demand of seeking pleasure (eat meat). People cannot avoid the pain of not eating meat, which violates utilitarian moral theory. However, I don't agree with this objection. In *Animal Liberation*, Singer extends the region of the principle of

equality to all species. As normal utilitarians claim that people should consider the highest general pleasure (utility) of all human-beings, they encourage us to give every human's interests equal consideration. As Singer's understanding of equality, we give every animal's interests equal consideration, which indicated that we shouldn't only consider utility of humans, but all species. In this case, the restriction of meat eating is not related only to the pain of carnivores, but the pleasure of the vast amounts of survived animals. Moreover, the intolerant idea of pain that people suffered is some kind of speciesism. Though humans, as higher intellectual animals, can seek for higher quality of pleasure, like speculating philosophy, and may contribute more utility in future than a poor intellectual animal, those kinds of trades are inefficient. Obviously, the result of comparisons of suffering between humans and animals that humans eat prefers to latter one: one human-being only sacrifices the sensory "pain" for not eating meat, while hundreds of animals may lose their lives and its potential pleasure in the future. In *Animal Liberation*, Singer said that we choose to save a human, only when there is an option between the life of a human and the life of an animal. In conclusion, in Singer's viewpoint, becoming a vegetarian can contribute more to the highest utility of all-species groups.

Second, there is an objection that attacks Singer's vegetarian claim that is unsupportable if plants can feel pain. If plants can feel pain, in Singer's view point that seeks for highest utility among all species, humans should starve.

However, I strongly disagree with it. The sacrifice for humans is different. In the

paragraph above, humans only limit our desire to eat meat, which is not harmful for human health. However, starving is a continual pain that is harmful for human health and in consequence will lead to human-beings' death. The continual discomfort of starving, in short term, will interfere with our interests to seek higher rank of pleasure. For instance, we feel anxious when we are starving even when we are listening to a concert. In the long run, starving to die will deprive our hoping, planning and working (the potential pleasure) in the future. On other side, for most of the vegetables that humans eat, its plants won't die after being plucked. So even if plants can feel pain, the result of comparisons of suffering between human and plants that we pluck prefers the former one. The sacrifice of plants is less than the loss of human's life. Moreover, according to Singer, "the conclusions that are argued for in this book flow from the principle of minimizing suffering along" (*Animal Liberation*, page 19). When we choose, it's impossible keep all species safe (not feeling pain), all we can do is choose a way that minimizes the total pain. The objection that encourages humans to starve seems consider all species' interests equally. But they ignore our purpose to make the highest utility among all species, and starving people in order to save plants is an inefficient way to contribute to the world.

In conclusion, we should consider all animals equal, though it may not lead to the exact same-way treatment toward different species. And as the principle of equality applies broader, there will be more vegetarian in the world, and less

cherishing animals will be sold. People will aware more about the details that avoid killing or pains of animals.