



## ANIMALS AND MORALITY: FOUR VIEWS

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### Introduction

In this essay we will be exploring the question as to whether or not nonhuman animals are morally considerable, and what our preferences should be when the interests of human and nonhumans clash. This is an issue of concern to Pagans and Christians. Though regretfully, Christians haven't demonstrated leadership and reflective thought in this area as often and consistently as they should have. This is especially the case based on the biblical foundation for a well-thought out and appropriate ethic towards animals. We will begin by exploring four ethical views in relation to animals that will help us to answer these questions.

### 1. Ethical Views on Animals.

When we seek to answer the question as to whether or not animals are morally considerable, we find that, especially over the last thirty years, there has been much debate and a variety of ethical views in this regard. We will look at four of the more prominent ethical views in relation to the moral significance of animals. It needs to be noted upfront that there is diversity within each of these views; however, we will only seek to present the general content of each view.

#### 1.1. Indirect Duty Views.

The prominent Catholic philosopher and theologian, Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) and the important enlightenment philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) are both significant figures who held indirect duty views. Essentially, indirect duty views hold that we don't have any *direct* duties toward animals. Rather we have *indirect* duties to them relating to humans. If asked whether it is wrong to harm animals, both Aquinas and Kant would answer in the affirmative, but their reasoning wouldn't be based on factors such as animals having the right not to be harmed, or that we should minimize pain in sentient beings. Rather, they argued that

if human beings perform actions that cause suffering to nonhuman animals, this may well desensitize them to engage in similar behavior to humans (Wennberg 2003, pp. 121-122).

It is likely that many people would find Aquinas's and Kant's views morally objectionable. This is shown anecdotally in stories such as the recent situation involving eighteen year old Matthew Staines who was found guilty of aggravated cruelty when he set alight a ten week old kitten with petrol in southwestern Sydney. The cruel act was caught on tape and played on the nightly news, thus receiving wide attention from the general public. Staines initially received a 16 month jail sentence, but this was reduced on appeal to a mere one-hundred hours of community service. According to a Courier Mail story, the appealed sentence "outraged" the RSPCA who believed the outcome would bring doubts to the community in relation to "our ability to safeguard animals and alleviate their pain and suffering." In addition, New South Wales Opposition Leader John Brogden referred to Staines's behavior as "an evil act" and stated that,

"One hundred hours of community service is a slap on the wrist for what is a very cruel, and in fact evil form of behaviour, which should be punished as it was intended to, by a jail sentence" (Arlington 2005).

Even if a person isn't a "cat lover", it appears that most people would respond with a sense of emotional anger or have the perception that an injustice has occurred when clear examples of animal suffering have occurred needlessly, such as in the Staines case. This is further supported by laws prohibiting animal cruelty in many countries.

However, in spite of the public response, it seems likely that many people who respond with a sense of outrage, anger or injustice in regard to cases such as the above, would nonetheless still hold to indirect duty views in regard to animals. Such people will find it in some sense wrong that an animal was treated cruelly, especially for apparent amusement. Yet if asked to commit to supporting, not merely indirect duties toward animals, but direct duties, we believe that many would find this proposition went further than they were willing to commit to (Wennberg 2003, p. 124).

In Tom Regan's discussion of indirect duty views, he notes that others hold this ethical perspective based on human attachments to animals which are emotional or property based. Regan illustrates how this works by hypothesizing that one person kicks another's dog. In this situation, indirect duty views don't hold that it is inherently wrong to kick dogs. However, this action is indirectly wrong because it may



emotionally upset the dog owner, and also because it is in some sense damaging the "property" of the dog owner. Thus, whilst it is acceptable to kick dogs, it is wrong to upset people or damage their property (Regan 1989, pp. 105-106).

In our estimate, indirect duty views fall short of being compelling because they fail to take into account the suffering of animals as inherently wrong on its own merits. Since animals feel pain and experience suffering, this needs to be affirmed to be *directly* morally wrong to the animal experiencing the suffering, rather than indirectly to humans.

### 1.2. Rights Views.

In our era we have strived to ensure that humans are accorded certain rights, which are to be enjoyed equally and regardless of race, gender, age, political or religious persuasion. This is expressed most prominently in the 1948 United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (General Assembly of the United Nations 1948). We have also sought to ensure that human beings cannot be tortured or degraded for any justification. This is expressed, for example, in the United Nations Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights 1984). However, we have only begun to ask in limited numbers questions relating to animal rights. Biologically speaking, humans are a species of animals. Nevertheless, humans are much more reluctant to affirm appropriately equivalent rights for members of nonhuman animals.<sup>1</sup>

Tom Regan has debatably been the most significant advocate for animal rights in recent times. He states that the,

"rights view in principle denies the moral tolerability of any and all forms of racial, sexual, or social discrimination; and unlike utilitarianism, the view in principle denies that we can justify good results by using evil means that violate an individual's rights" (Regan 1989, p. 111).

This view stands in contrast to utilitarian views, discussed below, which have no place for rights, and can theoretically justify good results by using evil means. However, contrary to utilitarianism, most people affirm that humans, at least, have rights.

Though many hold to rights views in relation to human beings, it is yet another matter to argue the same standpoint in relation to nonhuman animals. Regan responds to this objection by stating,

Attempts to limit its scope to humans only can be shown to be rationally defective. Animals, it is true, lack many of the abilities humans possess. They cannot read, do higher mathematics, build a bookcase, or make *baba ghanoush*. Neither can many human beings, however, and yet we do not (and should not) say that they (these humans) therefore have less inherent value, less of a right to be treated with respect, than do others (Ibid.)

If it is true that animals, and not only humans, have rights, then the rights view clearly has the most moral force behind it. However, though most people intuitively sense they have rights—especially in relatively recent historical times—we find when exploring this concept further, that they are notoriously difficult to defend morally or legally, and many ethicists deny that animals or humans have rights.

In 1999 lawyers Schmahmann and Polacheck wrote an article entitled “The Case Against Animal Rights” in the *Boston College Environmental Affairs Law Review*. In their article they put forward the case that, whilst human beings are accorded rights, there would be serious difficulties with affording animals rights. They write,

It is our thesis that it would be both implausible and dangerous to give or attribute legal rights to animals because such extension of legal rights would have serious, detrimental impacts on human rights and freedoms (Schmahmann and Polacheck 1995, p. 749).

As is seen, not only in Schmahmann’s and Polacheck’s use of the terms “implausible” and “dangerous”, but also in the contrasting views of those taking contrary ethical views, when it comes to whether or not animals have rights, the argument often becomes emotive and passionate. Often the argument surrounds the issue of pain and suffering. Most ethicists coming from rights and utilitarian views, though arguing from different ethical perspectives, are quick to point out that both human and nonhuman animal pain is important, and therefore needs to be taken into account. For example, Singer writes,

there can be no moral justification for regarding the pain (or pleasure) that animals feel as less important than the same amount of pain (or pleasure) felt by humans (Singer 1995, p. 15).

However, in contrast to the view of Singer and others, Schmahmann and Polacheck argue that whether a being is able to suffer or not is not in and of itself a significant enough criterion

with which access to legal rights and remedies is analyzed. While the capacity for suffering may be a common denominator of humans and animals, and is easily polemicized, legal rights have their origins



in and are intertwined with a multitude of complex and subtle concepts that may include, but are in no means limited to, sufferingö (Schmahmann and Polacheck 1995, p. 750).

We believe that a helpful way forward in this debate is the establishment of further laws against animal cruelty. As long as there is debate about whether or not nonhuman animals have rights, we would argue that it is important that animals are accorded certain protections in regard to their physical safety in the meantime. If there is any doubt about whether humans or animals have rights, we believe that it is prudentö not only in relation to humans but also nonhuman animalsö to err on the side of caution.

Furthermore, we don't find the arguments against animal rights convincing. Regardless of whether or not there continues to be debate about this matter, at the *very least*, they are important *pragmatic* necessities. Human beings have found it necessary that societies revolve around laws, rights, obligations and duties in order to ensure that humans are valued, cared for and protectedö consequently the helpfulness of documents such as The Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In secular pluralist societies there are a variety of perspectives, in order for our basic freedoms and protections to exist, we need to have a common basis to care not only for the strong, but also the weak.

The case against animal rights, especially by those who simultaneously argue for human rights, is unashamedly anthropocentric and a clear case of speciesism.<sup>2</sup> This is clearly demonstrated by Schmahmann's and Polacheck's weakly argued thesis that attributing rights to animals is "implausible" and "dangerous" specifically because "such extension of legal rights would have serious, detrimental impacts on human rights and freedoms" (Ibid., p. 750).

### 1.3. Utilitarian Views.

Utilitarian Peter Singer's book entitled "Animal Liberation" was published in 1975, and has continued to be read widely ever since. His views have had perhaps the most long-lasting and wide reaching effect of any book published in relation to whether or not animals are morally considerable. Though Singer sometimes uses the language of rights to put forward his views to the popular media, he does this as a pragmatic strategy rather than deriving from his utilitarian views.

Utilitarianism, in contrast to the view we've just observed, doesn't have a place for rights. Rather, utilitarian views seek to maximize pleasure and avoid pain. Robert Wennberg, who is Professor of

Philosophy at Westmont College, writes in regard to utilitarianism and animals,

“Classical utilitarian moral theory has had an exclusive concern with the production of favorable states of consciousness (e.g., pleasure) and the avoidance of unfavorable states of consciousness (e.g., pain). Thus, as soon as one recognizes that animals are conscious beings capable of pleasure and pain, one will then have to embrace animals as objects of moral concern” (Wennberg 2003, pp. 137-138).

We should affirm utilitarianism’s equal treatment and concern for both human and nonhuman animals. However, utilitarian views are often criticized by others who take differing ethical views in relation to animals for various reasons, including that this view doesn’t take seriously the concepts of inherent value or rights. Rather, utilitarianism only takes into account the pleasurable end of one’s interests (Regan 1989, p. 109). This is a decidedly shallow ethical stance. If the person—human or nonhuman animal in our case—isn’t inherently valuable or have rights, then why should their interests matter in the first place? Whilst we agree with the overwhelming majority of Singer’s and other utilitarian’s *conclusions* for treating nonhuman animals in a morally equivalent manner to humans, inherent value or rights will need to form the basis for arguing toward this view.

Wennberg notes (Ibid., p. 145) that another criticism of utilitarianism that has found its way into the discussion of animal welfare is that it allows for harming some individuals under situations when this mistreatment would generate the greatest amount of overall gladness compared to any other alternative action. Rosaline Hursthouse finds utilitarianism a deficient ethical position in regard to animals by using an application of this aspect of the theory when she states that,

“Since bullfighting gives pleasures to thousands at the relatively small cost of a few hours of horror and pain for the bull, a utilitarian should, in theory, be in favor of it for the Spaniards—pending their coming to find some other form of sport which causes less suffering, more enjoyable” (Ibid., p. 145).

Based on the well founded criticisms of utilitarianism, we would argue that views that are based on the inherent value or rights of nonhuman animals are more suitable for providing a logically coherent argument in relation to properly caring for animals. However, in practical efforts to protest the moral need to stop animal suffering, for example in regard to food production or animal research, those holding to both utilitarian views and rights based views will have much common moral ground in their actions.



#### 1.4. Faith Views.

So far we have looked at three different ethical views towards animals, and found the greatest strengths in the rights based views that take the inherent value and rights of animals, human or nonhuman, seriously. Our view is that nonhuman animals are morally considerable, and this is a commonly agreed point with many who hold to utilitarian and rights based views. However, what has been lacking so far is a moral foundation for claiming this. Specifically, it has been difficult to define precisely why, and what we would hold to, as the basis and source of the value of animals— not to mention humans. We believe that one significant answer to this question, though not the only possible answer, can be found in the faith traditions by arguing from a theocentric perspective that holds that God has created humans and animals with inherent value, and resulting rights. Thus in this view, the basis for the inherent value and rights for creation in general is found, not in humans giving value to each other or animals, but in God's value for them.

Though we will not concentrate exclusively on Christianity, we especially want to focus on this faith tradition as the (erroneous) claim has often been made that Christianity has been responsible for promoting the widespread and influential anthropocentric view, which fails to form the basis of an adequate ethical view on animals.

In 1966, Lynn White Jr. delivered a lecture entitled "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis."<sup>3</sup> This lecture has gone a long way in promoting the idea that Christianity is responsible for the current ecological crisis. Closely connected to this view is the claim that Christianity is responsible for destructive views towards nonhuman animals. The common thread here is that Christianity is allegedly anthropocentric in regard to living and nonliving creation, and thus fails to provide an adequate foundation for an animal ethic. Singer speaks for many when he states that,

"Christianity spread the idea that every human life— and only human life— is sacred" (Singer 1995, p. 191) and "A more enlightened view of our relations with animals emerges only gradually, as thinkers begin to take positions that are relatively independent of the church" (Ibid., 186).

However, when we look closely at the basis for these claims by Singer and others, what we often find is a poorly founded case based on case examples from a small number of prominent Christians throughout

history, and a selective quoting of Bible texts that are often misinterpreted in a manner that supports the author's views. In addition, comparatively few texts mention more positive historical examples. For example, it appears that in 1683 the Christian theologian Thomas Tyron became the first person to use the term "rights" in regard to animals in print (Armstrong and Botzler 2003, p. 4).

Kimberly Patton, in her Harvard Theological Review article, challenges the commonplace scholarship of the animal rights movement in regard to the charges made against Islam, Judaism and Christianity. She writes,

"In fact, the charge of Abrahamic anthropocentricity is as distorting as it is distressingly common" (Patton 2000, p. 406).

Instead of seeking to find common ground with the monotheistic religions, the animal rights movement has tended to see them and Christianity in particular, as its nemesis.

Though we would strongly argue against the assertion that Christianity is anthropocentric and doesn't have a firm basis for providing a comprehensive ethic for animals, we support the view that *some* prominent Christians throughout history, including the present, have held to unhelpful views in relation to animals. However, parallel to this, if we sought to build a case positing that philosophers, who aren't a part of the Christian tradition, are responsible for the current widespread and troubling views towards animals, and were to use the same methodology that has often been used to build a case against Christianity, it wouldn't take much effort to come to the same conclusions. In other words, we could use selective examples of prominent philosophers to demonstrate that philosophers are responsible for our current problem. However, here too, we would be arguing our case with a philosophically weak methodology.

In making a case for the positive contribution of Christianity towards an animal ethic, we need to begin by noting that Christianity decidedly doesn't take an anthropocentric view towards creation. Due to the foundational theological doctrine of God as Creator in Christian theology, this should be obvious. In the Christian tradition the adherent's worldview is decidedly *theocentric*. As Patton correctly understands,

"The Abrahamic traditions are not classically "anthropocentric" in the sense that they are so often indicted. Instead, they are theocentric, that is, they place God, not humanity at the center of their cosmological construction" (Patton 2000, pp. 407-408).



Thus, in regard to our discussion, from a Christian theocentric perspective, creation itself, living or nonliving, and regardless of species, has inherent value and rights— not because humans deem so, but because God does.

Though we won't spend much time looking throughout Christian history in regard to animals, it needs to be stated that, contrary to the examples such as Aquinas often used, there are many examples of Christians who had a very high view of animals. To begin with, there are many examples of early Christians who "showed deep concern for animals, for example, in rescuing animals from hunters, talking with animals, sharing their food, and caring for sick or wounded animals" (Armstrong and Botzler 2003, p. 3). The German Christian mystic, Hildegard, instructed, "Do not regard other creatures as existing merely to serve your bodily needs. By cherishing them as God requires, your soul will benefit" (Van de Weyer 1997, p. 41). Many well-known Christians have modeled for us a love for all types of creatures. Francis of Assisi called creatures his brothers and sisters (Bradley 1990, p. 97). Similarly, Mitton records that "There are many stories of Celtic saints showing love and concern for animals and birds, and indeed many stories of animals and birds showing concern for the saints" (Mitton 1995, pp. 56-57).

When one searches the Christian Scriptures as contained in the Old and New Testaments, there is a rich basis for a generous ethic toward animals. Proverbs 12:10 states that "A righteous person cares for the needs of their animal." Exodus 23:12 teaches that animals aren't to work any more than six days a week, thus establishing equal treatment for animals and humans. Ruether writes,

"God both works and rests and makes this the pattern for all humans, and even for (domesticated) animals. They too belong to the covenant and are to be given rest on the seventh day" (Ruether 1992, p. 20).

Ruether bases this on Deuteronomy 5:12-14 and Exodus 20:10, which includes the whole of the family household, including animals in the necessity of the Sabbath's day rest. In the story of the flood, God instructed Noah to build an ark and to take two of every creature, a male and a female. Calvin DeWitt, director of the AuSable Institute for Christian Environmental Education rightly says, "If you translated that story into modern terminology, you would frame it as saving threatened species" (AtKisson 1995, p. 7). According to the prominent evangelical theologian Millard Erickson,

“The elimination of any one of these kinds is consequently a loss that causes God regret and grief. On a continuing basis, numerous species are becoming extinct. It may seem a small matter to us when one of several similar or obscure species, such as the snail darter, passes out of existence. Yet in God’s sight the creation has, at least to some degree, become poorer” (Erickson 1993, p. 54).

In the book of Leviticus, God instructed Israel to have a seven-year cycle in relation to the land. During the seventh year several things were to take place. To begin with, Israel was not to sow or gather their crops. They were simply to let the land rest for the year (Leviticus. 25:2-5; 25:20-22). However, the Israelites, along with all those who are part of their community— including livestock and wild animals— were allowed to eat from the abundant crop God provided in the sixth year. After seven, seven-year cycles, the following year was to be a special Jubilee year where liberty was proclaimed throughout the land to all the inhabitants.

The Jubilee year recognized the relationship between the earth, humans, animals, and the rest of creation. It provided a way to bring healing, freedom, and restoration to the whole of God’s creation. Ruether rightly understands the importance of the Jubilee laws as lying in their provision of a model of redemptive eco-justice. Furthermore,

“Unlike apocalyptic models of redemption, the Jubilee vision does not promise a “once-for-all” destruction of evil. Humans will drift into unjust relations between each other, they will overwork animals and exploit land. But this drift is not to be allowed to establish itself as a permanent “order.” Rather, it is to be recognized as a disorder that must be corrected periodically, so that human society regains its right eco-social relationships and starts afresh” (Ruether 1992, p. 213).

The Jubilee year provides us with a healthy biblical principle for working towards healthy relationships between humans, animals and the earth.

In the above examples, we have presented a brief sketch of some of the principles upon which a case can be made that in everyday matters of importance, the welfare of animals was included roughly parallel with that of humans. Far from being anthropocentric, we see human and nonhuman animals being considered and cared for in our theocentric model of animal ethics.

In addition to everyday matters, animals are included in the Christian doctrines of redemption (soteriology) and the future (eschatology). Normally accounts of redemption focus on humanity, however Christian Scripture focuses on the redemption of the whole of creation, including



animals and nonliving creation (Romans 8:20-25). Wilkinson rightly says that we have focused on only part of the biblical doctrine of redemption and have left out God's concern for the renewal of all creation (Wilkinson 1993, p. 314). The renewal of the creation has been a consistent teaching in the Old and New Testaments.

This future state of affairs is understood to be a reversal of the effects of the fall of humanity (Genesis 3), where human and nonhuman creation originally lived together peacefully, and where there was not suffering or killing amongst the human or nonhuman species. In the Old Testament book of Isaiah this future vision is described thus:

In that day the wolf and the lamb will live together; the leopard and the goat will be at peace. Calves and yearlings will be safe among lions, and a little child will lead them all. The cattle will graze among bears. Cubs and calves will lie down together. And lions will eat grass as the livestock do. Babies will crawl safely among poisonous snakes. Yes, a little child will put its hand in a nest of deadly snakes and pull it out unharmed. Nothing will hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain. And as the waters fill the sea, so the earth will be filled with people who know the LORD (Isaiah 11:6-9).

Thus in the Christian tradition, it is understood that when paradise is restored there will not only be a reversal for humanity, but also for the whole of creation. Again, this is certainly not anthropocentric in perspective.

So far we have sought to paint a broad picture of the Christian view of animals. However, we briefly need to address two issues regularly brought up. The first is in regard to what relationship humans and nonhuman animals have, as related to "dominion" in Genesis 1; and second, the issue of vegetarianism.

In Genesis 1, when it comes to the idea of dominion or humans ruling nonhuman animals, this has often been misinterpreted by individuals seeking to build a case against the Christian ethic towards animals. Though such individuals would be well aware of the variety of ways, positive and negative, in which humans may "rule" or have leadership over other humans, it is virtually always argued that humans are here given free reign to use and abuse animals for any means it desires. In reality, there is nothing in this passage that suggests such an abuse of power. There is the sense that humans have dominion, or authority over animals in this passage, however, human dominion or stewardship over animals is to follow the pattern of God's power over humans. This is not a power that is used to the detriment of humans, but for their good. In the

same way, humanity is seen as responsible for caring for nonhuman animals. As theologian Walter Brueggemann writes,

“The dominance is that of a shepherd who cares for, tends, and feeds the animals. Thus the task of ‘dominion’ does not have to do with exploitation and abuse. It has to do with securing the well-being of every other creature and bringing the promise of each to full fruition” (Brueggemann 1982, p. 32).

Initially creation involved human and nonhuman animals being vegetarians (Genesis 1:29-30). As a result of the fall of humanity (Genesis 3) God’s preferred plan for creation collapses due to human sin and free will. Some of the most notable negative effects were directed towards humans (Genesis 3:15-19). However, after the flood the full consequences of the fall come into effect, which appears to include a state of affairs in which animals are eaten for food, and eat each other (Gen. 9:2-3). Wennberg comments,

“Formerly, only the green plants were available for human consumption; now, animal flesh is also available. This is not how things were originally meant to be. This is not an ideal state of affairs” (Wennberg 2003, p. 293).

Genesis 3 demonstrates that the fall primarily affected relationships between God and humanity, and from one human to another. Most importantly, it needs to be understood that the affects of the fall, likely including the reversal of vegetarianism, shouldn’t be the ideal humans seek to settle with. Rather, humanity should seek to live out the ideal as evidenced pre-fall.

So far we have observed four ethical views towards animals. We have sought to demonstrate that nonhuman animals are indeed morally considerable. The rights based views in particular provide the foundation for demonstrating this because they argue for the inherent value of animals, as well as the accordance of rights for animals. We have also sought to explore the Christian basis for viewing animals as morally considerable. We have found here a theocentric basis that provides the basis and source of their value in God’s attributing to them inherent value and rights to live a life of joy and meaning as intended by their Creator. Furthermore, we find an ideal of vegetarianism, and humans seeking to use their power over animals to care for them, rather than abuse them.

## **2. Against Speciesism: Toward Equality Amongst Animal Species.**

We have thus far argued that animals and humans are morally considerable. However, we need to consider what to do when the interests of nonhuman animals clash with those of humans. In particular, which should take precedence and why?



To begin with, it is clear that the question isn't whether we, as humans, *can* put our interests above animals. The question is whether we *should*. Because we can, and historically have, caused suffering and pain to animals and put our interests above theirs, an argument can be made that the general consensus is that we *should* use animals to whatever ends we choose. However, we would argue that what is more likely is that, as so often is the case with the status quo, we simply act without first thinking. When it comes to eating animals, for example, do most people think about what they put in their mouth? The immediate answer, of course, will be *öyesö*. However, do humans generally only think about what they chew or swallow based on its taste? Or in relation to our discussion, do people generally think, not only about *whatö* from a taste perspectiveö they are eating, but also think about *who* they are eatingö in terms of whether they are eating a formerly sentient being? In the author's anecdotal experience of discussing these issues with others, it seems clear that most people only think about what they are eating and haven't given any thought to whether another living being had to die for them to enjoy their meal.

### 2.1. Speciesism.

Richard Ryder coined the term *öspeciesismö*, which has been widely used in animal rights discussions. Speciesism is a type of prejudice that seeks to justify the preference of one type of animal over another based purely on their speciesö in effect, speciesism is normally used in relation to the human prejudice for the preference of the human species against all other animal species (Singer 1995, pp. 6, 243).

It needs to be clarified that people don't fall into speciesism merely because they deny that human and nonhuman animals shouldn't be expected to have *exactly* the same rights or preferential treatment. Clear thinking about equality between species takes into account the differences between the species and seeks to provide acceptably equivalent preferences between species. For example, it would be nonsense to argue that animals should have the right to vote because humans do, since animals can't vote (Ibid., p. 2). Singer helpfully notes,

öPrecisely what our concern or consideration requires us to do may vary according to the characteristics of those affected by what we do: concern for the well-being of children growing up in America would require that we teach them to read; concern for the well-being of pigs may require no more than that we leave them with other pigs in a place where there is adequate food and room to run freelyö (Ibid., p. 5).

Admittedly, we are partially handicapped in this discussion because we are not able to communicate with animals in a manner to ensure that we are considering them adequately, but through studying the behavior of the varied species of animals we will likely go a long way towards remedying this difficulty.

Ensuring that we aren't speciesist will help us come to an unbiased ethic towards animals that genuinely takes their best interests into consideration. It is likely that appropriately caring for animals will be far more easy than it is to care for humans, who appear to expect far more in terms of what will genuinely bring joy and meaning to their life.

## **2.2. Issues of Preference.**

In our discussion of preference, we are taking for granted that animals both feel pain and suffer, and that these are evils for nonhuman and human animals. Furthermore, we believe that we should work to abolish the suffering of animals and humans. Yet in working out how we should implement our efforts to care for animals and humans, and seek to work against suffering, we believe that there will be some issues that work for the well-being of both animals and humans, and other issues that need to have some ordering of priority or preference.

To begin with, we believe that there are some issues that will require effort on the part of humans, but that can work in the best interests of humans and animals. An example of one such issue is the use of animals for food. There are a variety of viewpoints that one can reach here, though the position that works in the best interests of both humans and nonhumans is a vegetarian diet.<sup>4</sup> This position most certainly ensures that animals will have the best chance of leading meaningful lives that last longer than would otherwise be the case. Along these lines, it cannot be stressed strongly enough that our current methods of raising many animals for food, though especially chickens, pigs and veal, are barbaric, cruel and completely unethical. A vegetarian diet would also work in the best interests for a greater number of humans. The grain and water required to raise animals to slaughter for food, could much better be put to use for humans in parts of the world where these items are scarce. As Singer notes,

those who claim to care about the well-being of human beings and the preservation of our environment should become vegetarians for that reason alone. They would thereby increase the amount of grain available to feed people elsewhere, reduce pollution, save water and energy, and cease contributing to the clearing of forests; moreover, since a vegetarian diet is cheaper than one based on meat dishes, they would have more money available to devote to famine



relief, population control, or whatever social or political cause they thought most urgentö (Ibid., p. 221).

Though taking this step would cause some initial adjustments for humans, it appears that our strongest reasons for continuing to eat animals for food include human-centered selfishness at the cost of animal lives and human hunger.

When it comes to preference, we also believe that some issues will require ordering of preference for humans. For example, we hold along with Wennberg (Wennberg 2003, pp. 142-144) that we will have competing priorities between, not only animals and humans, but between humans when it comes to our efforts.

It is obvious that there is great need and suffering throughout the world. There are many people starving due to malnutrition; many others are suffering due to lack of medical care; animals are suffering in places due to heavy logging; fish are dying due to heavily polluted waters. In addition, there are needs and experiences of pain and suffering within our immediate family, close associates and neighbors. Do we have an equal duty to care for each of these concerns? Should we care for each of these situations based on which is most urgent, therefore, perhaps neglecting a five-year-old daughter to care for a more urgent need experienced by another member of the animal species? We believe that when it comes to deciding preference, we need to decide not merely between human and nonhuman animals. Rather, we need to decide based on our duty of care based on relationship. Thus a parent would put resources toward caring for a lesser evil experienced by their child because of a parent's duty of care (Ibid., 142).

Lest our position be misunderstood, it needs to be stressed that we hold that humans have the duty to care for animals regardless of their species in a morally and practically equivalent way, as discussed above. However, our preferences will be decided based on our most significant duties of care.

In addition, humans will give preference to other humans in regard to forming societies for the well-being of humans. It is essential that human societies don't use their bonds to the detriment of nonhuman animals. For example, we find the overwhelming use of nonhuman animals for research abhorrent and cruel. Nonetheless, we also hold that there are good reasons why humans should put humans as a priority in relation to time and energy.

My concern in this discussion of preferences is that it will be viewed as bringing in speciesism through the back door, so to speak (Ibid., 144). However, we again need to stress that we aren't seeking to use instances of preference toward humans as an excuse for not having duties towards animals. Furthermore, we would argue that what is necessary for genuinely ensuring we fulfill our duties to humans doesn't interfere with the moral need to also uphold the right for animals to not be harmed by humans. When it comes to human/animal relationships, it is largely only when humans go well beyond what they need and fall into excessive greed, that nonhuman animals suffer.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, we believe that nonhuman animals are morally considerable. We base this on the inherent value that they receive from their Creator. When the interests of nonhuman animals and humans clash, we must as often as possible seek to put the interests of animals and humans on as equal a footing as possible. Though in cases that don't result in suffering for animals, we also believe that humans will seek to prioritize their relationships with each other in order to ensure that we work towards a strong foundation for caring for families, human relationships and societies.

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<sup>1</sup> We will discuss further what we mean by "appropriately equivalent rights" below.

<sup>2</sup> More will be said in regard to speciesism below.

<sup>3</sup> This lecture was delivered December 26, 1966, at the Washington meeting of the American Academy for the Advancement of Science. The text of the lecture was printed in an article in *Science* magazine in 1970.

<sup>4</sup> For a fuller discussion of the arguments against animal food production and for a vegetarian diet, see Singer 1995, pp. 95-183.