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# PROCEEDINGS



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## ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

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I come from the perspective of having done many of the things to which I now object, such as the eating of nonhuman animals, the harmful use of them in biomedical research, teaching and testing, the use of them for entertainment, and so on. If you had asked me a long time ago if I thought it was appropriate to harm or kill other animals to benefit human animals, I would have said yes, albeit with the usual caveat that we must not abuse them. I had not, however, carefully explored the ethical considerations of this value judgment, and my perception of abuse was rather limited.

After studying the issue carefully, I came to the conclusion that essentially all arguments in favor of harming and killing other animals by humans simply are rationalizations and not legitimate justifications. All are fundamentally flawed particularly from a moral perspective. The major defense put forth is that humans, or other animals, derive benefits from this use. In other words, the end justifies the means. This, however, is something we as a society have rejected when it comes to our interaction with each other. When it comes to human beings, we do not accept the notion of a master race. Nor do we believe that having the strength or other ability to overcome someone gives us the right to exploit them. Nor do we allow the anticipation of benefits to the human specie as a whole guide our conduct towards each other. These proscriptions are part of our moral code.

When it comes to nonhuman animals, however, most humans completely disregard this moral code. Why is it considered ethical to harm or kill other animals in the name of science, education, entertainment, and so forth? No one has ever put forth a rational argument demonstrating that the individuals involved are not deserving of serious moral concern.

Our sense of morality in dealing with each other stems from our highest capacity for benevolent action. This is not limited to or simply the result of the fact that we are talking about human beings. The reason it is wrong to harm another human being is not because he or she is a human being per se. It is because of certain qualities the person has which are important to consider and protect. The person is an individual who has a life that fares better or worse depending on what happens to her or him. The person has value that is not dependent upon her or his utility to another. He or she has interests whose pursuit are a source of enjoyment and whose denial are a source of frustration. In part, these are the bases for the "inalienable" rights we give each other. Even people with no concept of what is right or wrong and who have no obligations to others are granted these rights. I refer to children, the "permanently" comatose and the mentally enfeebled.

Like human animals, other animals have a life that fares better or worse depending on what happens to that life. Also like humans, other animals have interests, although they may be different from those of humans. When you examine the issue without prejudice, there do not appear to be any *morally relevant* differences between humans and other animals that justify denying other animals similar rights, consideration or respect *based upon their interests*. There are no morally compelling differences between humans and other animals that justify treating other animals so radically different from the manner in which humans are treated.

Differences between various people, for example intelligence, gender or race, are biological and are, therefore, irrelevant from a moral perspective. In the case of nonhuman animals, the major differences from humans also are biological. Essentially

all characteristics alleged to be important and uniquely human actually are shared to some degree with many other animals and do not even exist in some human beings. The other arguments put forth by some, for example that other animals do not have political systems or do not compose symphonies, are nonsensical or vacuous and are rejected by those who view this issue in a rational and thoughtful manner.

On these bases, the phrase, "A rat is a pig is a dog is a boy," has been made by those proposing rights for nonhuman animals. Opponents point to this phrase as if it "proves" that those who believe in animal rights do not value human life. This is absurd. The phrase in no way demeans human beings. Instead, it emphasizes the biological and moral similarities between all mammalian species as a start. Those supporting the use of other animals in research, for example, must agree with at least the physical aspect of this analogy. After all, they argue that rats are "models" of boys in justifying experiments on the rats.

All the ridiculous arguments aside, we do to other animals what we do, not out of some moral imperative or because it is right, rather because we have the *power* to dominate them. We tacitly act on the morally repugnant principle that might makes right. The question is not, therefore, whether benefits for humans are derived from using other animals or whether there are adequate alternatives. It is whether our domineering behavior is appropriate for such an intelligent and highly developed specie such as ours.