

Handout 17: Singer "All animals are equal"

Singer: Morality requires that we give as much weight to the interests of animals as we give to the interests of humans.

Five objections to Singer's claim.

OBJECTION 1: It is sometimes thought that the basis for equal treatment among the races and sexes is that the races and sexes are equal in intellectual and emotional abilities. Animals are not equal to us in intellectual and emotional abilities. Therefore, we are not morally required to give equal weight to the interests of animals.

OBJECTION 2: Even if there are differences between individuals, as a whole, different races and sexes of humans are equal in intellectual and moral capacities. As a whole, animals are not equal to us. Therefore, we are not morally required to give equal weight to the interests of animals.

OBJECTION 3: If we give animals equal consideration the way we give other humans, then that means we are going to have to send cows to school and give pigs the right to vote. That would be ludicrous!

OBJECTION 4: The interests of humans count for more than the interests of animals simply because something's being a human gives it a kind of value that no animal has.

OBJECTION 5: If we are morally required to take the interests of animals into consideration, then we should also be required to take the interests of plants into consideration. But its crazy to think we should have to give the interests of plants the same importance we give to the interests of humans!

Question: If Singer is right, what are the implications?

- (a) Can we experiment on animals?
- (b) Can we hunt them?
- (c) Can we raise them in factory farms?
- (d) Can we eat them if we kill them painlessly?

Killing: can we kill animals if we do so painlessly?

Proposed criteria for having a right to life.

An individual, S, has a right to life if and only if:

1. S is a human being.
2. S is capable of self-awareness and planning.
3. S is able to use language.
4. S is capable of conscious thought.
5. S is sentient (can feel pleasure &/or pain).