



# Animal Rights Philosophy and its Relation to Veganism

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# Tonight We Will Discuss...

## **Animal Rights:**

- Western society's historical views on other animals.
- Modern animal rights philosophies: utilitarian, duty-based, feminist, and legal.

## **Vegetarianism:**

- Historical viewpoints in favor of vegetarianism.
- Modern animal rights viewpoints on veganism.
- Movement debates on vegan activism: welfare v. rights.
- Non-Speciesist terminology.

- **Exercise:** using philosophy to guide your responses to common questions about animal rights and veganism.



# Historical Views of Other Animals

## Ancient Times

- Pythagoras and Plato perceived kinship.
- Porphyry argued against exploitation.
- Aristotle saw other animals, human women and some men as slaves.
- Pagan religions often worshipped other animals.
- Judeo-Christianity viewed humans as dominant and separate. We have dominion over them.



# Historical Views of Other Animals

## Scientific Revolution

- Cartesianism: 17<sup>th</sup> cent. Scientist Rene Descartes promoted mind/body dualism as man/animal dualism. Animals are senseless automata. Enabled vivisection and limited discourse to welfare for centuries.
- Locke and Kant argued against using humans as a means, but it was okay to use nonhumans if it benefited humans. Otherwise, it was cruelty which made men inhumane towards other men.



# Historical Views of Other Animals

## 18<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> Century

- Utilitarians Bentham and Mill, plus Schopenhauer, show concern for animal sentience. Call for humane treatment and restriction of animal use. Food and some research still okay.
- Humans' abstract thought can be conceived as beneficial (Hegel, Marx) or alienating (Nietzsche, Schopenhauer).



# Historical Views of Other Animals

## Late 19<sup>th</sup>, Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century (Bergh formed ASPCA– US humane movement develops)

- U.S. Zoologist J. Howard Moore preceded Singer's notion of speciesism by critiquing human bias and all forms of exploitation as criminal.
- British writer/teacher/humanitarian Henry Salt first to connect human rights to animal rights. Vegetarian activist.
- Dr. Albert Schweitzer won 1952 Nobel Peace Prize for philosophy of reverence for life (plants included). Harm must be necessary.



# Contemporary Animal Rights Viewpoints – 1970s on...

## **PETER SINGER: equal interests for sentient beings**

- Utilitarian – goal to do what maximizes pleasure and minimizes pain. So focus is on animal feelings.
- To discriminate against them because they're not human is "speciesist" – an unfounded group bias.
- What humans value is sentience of other people, not intelligence (ex: marginalized cases).
- Many animals are equally sentient.
- So we must respect and consider other animals' interests equally to our own. (even if interests are different).



# Contemporary Animal Rights Viewpoints – 1970s on...

## **TOM REGAN: equal rights for conscious “subjects of a life”**

- Duty-based philosopher: consistent use of right means. Don't use anyone as a means to an end.
- Most animals are conscious individuals who value their lives (subjects of a life).
- We should extend our concept of human rights to other subjects of a life for moral consistency in respecting life.
- Subjects have inherent value, so it is wrong to value them solely as a utility/resource/object. Discontinue exploitation.



# Contemporary Animal Rights Viewpoints- 1970s on...

## **FEMALE PERSPECTIVES:**

- **Mary Midgley** argues for compassion, not interests or rights. Compassion less abstract than equality. Compassion does not require other animals to have the same traits as humans. One simply needs to feel sympathy to avoid causing others to suffer.
- **Ethic of Care:** finds Singer's and Regan's arguments too individualistic, abstract, and rationalistic. Prefers to emphasize kinship and community/connection. We should act not out of duty but out of sympathy and love.
- **Ecofeminist:** Men have dominated women since women are closer to other animals and nature. Male/Female. Reason/Emotion. Mind/Body. Man/Animal.



# Contemporary Animal Rights Viewpoints- 1970s on...

## Legal Activist Perspectives:

- **Gary Francione:** A.R. is about justice and abolition of exploitation. It demands the “incremental eradication of the property status of animals” to raise them to the level of “personhood.”
- **Lee Hall:** A.R. is a duty-based ethic granting nonhumans the right to privacy and freedom from human intrusion and control. It isn't benevolent stewardship but independence.



# Contemporary Animal Rights Viewpoints- 1970s on...

## **Animal Welfare has the following characteristics (by Francione):**

1. it recognizes animal sentience but believes nonhumans are not as worthy of moral respect as humans,
  2. it recognizes the property status of nonhumans while wanting to limit the rights of property owners (merely regulating animal exploitation), and
  3. it accepts trading away the interests of nonhumans in favor of human interests only if the latter are deemed significant and necessary.
- Hall & Francione warn against conflating welfare and rights. Theory should inform practice for logical consistency. Make sure incremental activist goals promote rights not welfare.



# Animal Rights Paradoxes

- Derrida and Wolfe critique the humanist foundation of animal rights philosophies built on a human rights model of emphasizing **similarities** – like sentience.
- Two questions I ask:
  1. Is animal rights **building up other animals** to be as valuable as we humans are? *Ironically anthropocentric: creating sub-humans?*
  2. Or is animal rights **bringing us humans down** off our moral pedestal to embrace our animality? .... *Could add diversity frame?*



# Historical Views on Vegetarianism

## ANTIQUITY Pythagoras, Plutarch, Porphyry

- Ancient writers often acknowledged a **kinship** between humans and other animals, allowing nonhumans the **capacities of reason and emotion** that scientific thought of later centuries would deny them. Writers of this era often stated how the **killing of animals for food is unjust because it is unnecessary**. They also worried that human cruelty towards other animals **desensitizes** people toward cruelty to humans.



Then Christianity largely thwarted vegetarianism up through 18<sup>th</sup> century...

# Historical Views on Vegetarianism

## 18<sup>th</sup> & 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries

- 18th century authors were spawned in resistance to Cartesianism to promote animal sentience. Other writings emphasized the anthropocentric idea that flesh-eating does not lead to a virtuous character.
- 19th century authors were often anthropocentric, but they showed an increasing concern for sentience by including vivid descriptions of slaughterhouse violence. Some writings have a tone of pity for other animals as weak victims on whom humans should bestow charity.

*(Tolstoy, Dr. William Alcott, Dr. Anna Kingsford)*



# Animal Rights Views on Vegetarianism

## Henry Salt (turn of 20<sup>th</sup> century):

- We are hypocrites to call ourselves civilized when we are **violent/savage**.
- He recognized that some harm is necessary in harvesting plant crops, but raising of animals for slaughter is **unnecessary harm**.
- Like Tolstoy and Kingsford, he saw vegetarianism as foundational to a **virtuous life**.
- He influenced Gandhi. They both believed the **strongest reason to go vegetarian was for animal ethics, not health**.  
Altruistic basis sustains all other motives and promotes evolution to higher ethics.



# Modern Animal Rights Views on Veganism

## Tom Regan:

- It is **killing** that should be avoided, not just causing pain. Even idyllic farms take life.
- Asks for **moral consistency** in respecting all human and nonhuman life. No morally relevant aspect of humanity separates us from other beings with a conscious interest in living.
- The “total **abolition** of commercial animal agriculture” is a goal of the animal rights movement.



# Modern Animal Rights Views on Veganism

## Peter Singer:

- Animal agriculture is **speciesist**. It sacrifices the *major* interests of nonhumans for the *minor* interests of humans.
- We should make it a “simple general principle to **avoid killing** animals for food **except when it is necessary for survival.**”



# Modern Animal Rights Views on Veganism

## Stephen Clark:

- Since flesh-eating is largely **unnecessary** it is morally untenable.
- **Hypocrite** angle: “Those who still eat flesh when they could do otherwise have no claim to be serious moralists.”



# Modern Animal Rights Views on Veganism

## Carol Adams (ecofeminist):

- “Women and animals are similarly positioned in a patriarchal world, as **objects** rather than subjects”
- Women and farmed animals both endure a “cycle of objectification, fragmentation, and **consumption.**”



# Modern Animal Rights Views on Veganism

## Carol Adams (ecofeminist):

- Meat is associated historically with masculinity and male power (last 20,000 yrs only...herbivorous before).
- Plant-based societies are more egalitarian than patriarchal.
- Agriculture uses female animals to profit off their reproductive systems.



*Meat eggs and dairy are not feminist food.*

# Modern Animal Rights Views on Veganism

## **Q: Better quality of life & death on free range farm than in wild?**

- Assumes animals would give up freedom for a few years of security before premature slaughter. But farmed animals have no choice to be free.
- Implies farmers “saved” animals from wild instead of creating their lives as captives. Farmers kill other natural predators too, so death is increased.
- Assumes animal activists want farmed animals set loose in woods. Wrong. We don't want breeding of domesticated animals.



# Use Language that Fits Your Philosophy

## – Avoid Industry Euphemisms

### Joan Dunayer and Carol Adams:

- Humans and **other animals** or human animals and nonhuman animals.
- **Enslaved** beings. **Exploited**. Captive.
- **Farmed** animals.
- **He or she, someone, somebody** (not “it”)
- Cow, calf, bird, fish who is raised for (meat).
- **Flesh** of a pig, bird, cow, fish, etc. (not poultry, pork, beef, seafood).
- Cow’s milk. Her eggs.
- Animal agrib**usiness**. Industry.
- **Less inhumane** farms (not “humane” farms).



# Internal Debates in Veg Activism – Welfare v. Rights

**Q: Should we promote industry welfare reforms and some “humane” products? A: YES**

- Legal reform could be a gradual step toward veganism in future. Ex: England. (?)
- Reform drives prices up & consumption down (?)
- Helps mitigate suffering of billions in short-term.
- Morale. Gives orgs lots of small victories needed for fundraising & media.
- Media coverage raises public consciousness to not view animals just as commodities.
- Cage-free campaigns *are* in sync with animal rights philosophy (?)



*Some arguments in Satya magazine by Singer,  
Miyun Park (HSUS), & Bruce Friedrich (PETA).*

# Internal Debates in Veg Activism – Welfare v. Rights

**Q: Should we promote industry welfare reforms and some “humane” products? A: NO**

- Goal is to promote veganism (no exploitation) not to promote industry’s “nicer” foods or to regulate acceptable levels of cruelty.
- A.R. is life-affirming while reform still promotes killing and exploitation with less guilt.
- Don’t allow meat to be a necessary evil.



*Some arguments in Satya magazine by Eddie Lama, Bob Torres, Lee Hall, Joan Dunayer, Howard Lyman, & James LaVeck.*

# Internal Debates in Veg Activism – Welfare v. Rights

**Q: Should we promote industry welfare reforms and some “humane” products? A: NO (continued)**

- Control discourse so problem is defined as exploitation not husbandry/welfare.
- Don't send mixed messages that introduce moral ambiguity and weaken our position.
- Don't hide abolitionist “agenda” – own with pride.
- Vegan frame connects us with larger A.R. goals and with environmentalism (welfare doesn't).



*Some arguments in Satya magazine by Eddie Lama, Bob Torres, Lee Hall, Joan Dunayer, Howard Lyman, & James LaVeck.*

# The Rights Approach is the Right Approach

Let your philosophy guide your actions and your speech. Don't restrict it to fit what the speciesist establishment deems reasonable. Redefine reason to transform society.

"if we are not going to give the hard message for what the animals need, who is?"

- *Patty Mark (Australia)*

