

# Peter Singer on Animal Ethics

Singer, P., 2015. Animal Liberation. 2nd ed. London: The Bodley Head.

## 1. All Animals Are Equal...

"Animal Liberation" may sound like a parody of other liberation movements; in fact, in the eighteenth century, Thomas Taylor parodied the women's liberation movement by making a satirical case for the liberation of animals. He argued that extending the rights of men to include women could be taken a stage further; using this reasoning, the rights of men should be extended to animals as well. Thomas Taylor argued that this argument was clearly absurd, so the women's liberation movement should be resisted; however, today, it is widely agreed that men and women resemble one another closely enough to receive equal rights.

Sex is an arbitrary difference between men and women with which to discriminate between them, just as race and intelligence quotient (IQ) are. In the United States, Thomas Jefferson and Sojourner Truth recognised the arbitrary nature of these divisions: Thomas Jefferson privately acknowledged that race should not confer some human beings the right to own others, whilst Sojourner Truth proudly proclaimed that sex should not prevent women from receiving rights that are granted to men. In both cases, Thomas Jefferson and Sojourner Truth compared real discrimination based on race or sex to imagined discrimination based on intelligence; they used this comparison to argue that discrimination based on race or sex is just as indefensible as discrimination based on intelligence.

Sex, race, and IQ are all arbitrary characteristics; consequently, using them to withhold rights from some human beings is unjustified. In the eighteenth century, Jeremy Bentham identified the vital characteristic that should be used to discriminate between living things that human beings grant rights and living things that human beings withhold rights from: the capacity for suffering (i.e. the ability to experience pain and pleasure). The ability to experience pain and pleasure gives rise to interests (e.g. the interest to avoid pain), and interests are the basis of rights. In ethical decision-making, the principle of equality requires that all equal interests are given equal consideration; it is speciesism to give equal human interests greater consideration than equal animal interests.

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The overwhelming majority of human beings are speciesists, because they sacrifice the most essential interests of animals in order to satisfy the most trivial interests of human beings. One general defence of speciesism exists, which is the argument that animals do not have interests. Whilst the argument that animals cannot suffer from knowing they will be slaughtered is sound, they can still experience pain from a blade or electric current. Nevertheless, there are human beings who deny the ability of animals to feel any form of pain (psychological or otherwise) in order to justify treating them as they wish.

It is possible to deny that animals feel pain, but the reasoning used requires such people to accept that other human beings may not feel pain. Pain is a subjectively experienced mental state, so it cannot be observed objectively; people infer that other human beings experience pain, because they observe similar reactions to it (e.g. squirming, grimacing, and screaming). This inference should be extended to the reactions of animals, because their nervous systems are similar to those of human beings (especially birds and mammals), the ability to experience pain confers a similar evolutionary advantage to animals and human beings, and the scientific community agrees that many animals can experience pain and suffering.

Some philosophers claim pain can only be experienced by speaking organisms, because states of consciousness can only be meaningfully attributed to speaking organisms or because a statement of pain is the best proof of pain. However, it is unlikely that language is inseparably linked with states of consciousness, and people can lie about pain. In sum, there are no good scientific or philosophical reasons for concluding that animals do not feel pain. This does not mean that all animals and human beings experience pain in the same way, or that slapping a horse is as harmful as slapping a baby; however, because there is no reason why human pain should be prevented more than animal pain, it does mean that human beings should significantly change how they treat animals.

The ethical dilemma of whether or not human beings should kill animals is different from the ethical dilemma of whether or not human beings should cause pain and suffering to animals. Generally, people agree that causing pain and suffering is wrong (to both animals and human beings); however, there are cases when some people argue that killing other human beings is ethically acceptable (e.g. abortion, and euthanasia). It is easier to establish that some human treatment of animals is wrong because of the pain and suffering caused than because it eventually ends in death. Consequently, the argument developed in Animal Liberation focuses on the human infliction of pain and suffering rather than the human infliction of death.

Evaluating the worth of either an animal or a human life is usually done by analysing characteristics that confer quality of life (e.g. the ability to form meaningful social relationships, and the ability to plan for the future). Considering these characteristics is not necessary to evaluating whether or not it is acceptable to cause pain to either an animal or a human being. By way of analogy, if it is only possible to save the life of an able-bodied human being or a severely mentally disabled one, most people would choose to save the life of the able-bodied human being. However, if it only possible to give one of these two human beings pain relief for an unpleasant but nonlethal injury, most people would struggle to make a decision about who to treat.

Chapters 2-3 explore two important examples of speciesism: animal experimentation and farming animals for food. There are many other examples of speciesism (e.g. culling, fishing, fur farming, hunting, and whaling); however, these two are the most significant. Animal experimentation affects hundreds of millions of animals every year, and is mostly funded by general taxation in more economically developed countries (MEDCs) like the United States. Farming animals for food affects billions of animals a year, and is a practice that the overwhelming majority of human beings support by eating meat and other animal products. Successfully challenging these two examples of speciesism will likely undermine the remaining practices.

## **2. Tools for Research...**

In the second half of the twentieth century, the United States military experimented extensively on dogs and primates. Generally, experiments used electric shocks to condition dogs or primates to perform simple tasks, and then observed how well the tasks were performed after the dogs or primates were exposed to chemical agents or radiation. Despite some high-profile protests, these experiments have largely continued uninterrupted.

Likewise, also in the second half of the twentieth century, university psychology departments experimented extensively on a wide variety of primates. Generally, experiments separated infant primates from their mothers and isolated them from all contact (including human contact). The number of devices sold by the animal experimentation industry for these experiments (among others) reveals the size of the industry.

Many of the most painful animal experiments are performed in the field of psychology. Experiments routinely involve the use of either escapable or inescapable electric shocks administered to either condition or modify behaviour. One notable experiment involved submitting the feet, eyeballs, or ears of mice to electric shocks, many of which died from the shocks. Other notable experiments involved submitting dogs to inescapable electric shocks until they stopped attempting to escape them, and submitting Shetland ponies to electrified drinking water.

Approximately 10 percent of animal experiments in the field of psychology make use of electric shocks. This figure is generated from an analysis of animal experiment findings published in academic journals; however, only a fraction of animal experiment findings are published, and even these are of limited or trivial use. Psychologists try to avoid anthropomorphising animals in the reports of their experiments; ironically, this denies the similarities between animals and human beings (which undermines the purpose of the experiments).

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Many substances are tested on animals to ascertain whether or not they are safe for human beings. It is likely that fewer than half of these are for medical or veterinary use; the majority are for cosmetic or household use. One notable animal test involves poisoning animals to death to determine the toxic concentration of a substance; another (the Draize Test) involves pouring the substance into the eye of a rabbit to determine its irritant effect.

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Many animal tests are pointless, because some substances harm animals but not human beings, or human beings but not animals. Since the increased activity of the animal liberation movement, the Draize Test has been abandoned by most major cosmetic companies. Nevertheless, the easiest way for human beings to prevent the needless pain and suffering of animals is to avoid purchasing unnecessary products that contain toxins.

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Medical research also causes considerable pain and suffering to animals, and many of it is pointless. Over the last hundred years, various medical researchers have subjected rats, rabbits, and dogs (among other animals) to extreme heat (in many cases, to the point of death). Generally, medical researchers have concluded from these experiments that human beings suffering from heatstroke should be cooled, something already known.

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Heatstroke is not the only medical condition to inspire pointless animal experimentation. Research on shock has inspired hundreds of experiments that inflict shock-inducing injuries to animals (e.g. burns, gunshot wounds, and strangulation), despite the fact these experiments have repeatedly shown that animal models provide poor predictors of shock responses in human beings. Similar experiments on drug addiction have also been widespread.

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The conditioned ethical blindness of research scientists is what allows animal experimentation to continue unabated. Ironically, research scientists are conditioned by the prospects of career advancement and salary increases in much the same way as their subjects are conditioned by electric shocks. Distressingly, senior figures in the scientific community acknowledge that most experiments reveal nothing new or significant.

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Animal experimentation is also facilitated by weak regulations, especially in the United States. These weak regulations are maintained by powerful business and science lobbies that have vested interests in preserving the status quo. Alarming, many senior figures in the scientific community do not consider animal experimentation an ethical issue (which is the philosophical equivalent of claiming the Earth is flat).

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Some animal experimentation is ethically acceptable, but only if it confers a considerable benefit (none of the experiments outlined in this chapter do). To avoid speciesism, research scientists could be asked whether or not severely mentally disabled and orphaned infants are acceptable alternatives to animals as experimental subjects. In practice, members of the animal liberation movement could be asked to join ethics committees.

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Animal experimentation has made a minimal contribution to increased life expectancy and quality of life. In saving human life, the scientific community should focus on disseminating medical knowledge more widely (approximately 250,000 children die every week from preventable causes). In preventing animal experimentation, the animal liberation movement should focus on small measurable goals (e.g. tightening regulations).

### 3. Down on the Factory Farm...

Eating meat is the most obvious and widespread example of speciesism. "Meat" is used to disguise the eating of flesh, just as "beef" and "pork" are used to disguise the eating of cow and pig. In order to make farming more economical, factory farming processes have been introduced across the United States; these cause considerable pain and suffering to many species of farm animal.

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Factory farming chickens for meat (also known as "broilers") causes considerable pain and suffering. Some chicken sheds contain tens of thousands of chickens, which are fed in cramped, confined, and windowless conditions for approximately seven weeks before slaughter. In order to prevent cannibalism, chickens are routinely debeaked without anaesthetic.

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Factory farming chickens for eggs (also known as "layers") also causes considerable pain and suffering. On egg farms, male chicks are separated from female chicks and gassed, ground-up alive, or discarded into bin bags in which they crush one another to death. Female chickens are usually confined to cages from birth, and many large farms keep over a million. In the United States, most chickens have less than half a side of typewriting paper in cage floor space; these cramped conditions induce severe stress, which 10-15 percent of caged chickens die from every year. Stress is sometimes deliberately induced, in order to trigger forced molting (a period when egg production increases); to accomplish this, chickens may be temporarily starved (e.g. for 48-72 hours) and deprived of water (e.g. for 24-48 hours). When egg production decreases (after approximately 18 months), chickens are sold for slaughter.

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Factory farming pigs is particularly concerning, because they are among the most intelligent species of animal. In order to increase productivity, many farms confine pigs to gestation crates from shortly after birth until the age of five or six months (when they are slaughtered). Breeding pigs also endure a considerable amount of pain and suffering: female pigs are often artificially inseminated, confined to so-called "iron maidens" to give birth, and immediately separated from their piglets. Additionally, breeding pigs are only fed approximately 60 percent of what they would usually eat; this keeps them permanently hungry, and supports larger profits for pig farmers.

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The most unethical form of factory farming is veal farming. In the United States, between birth and 14 weeks of age (when they are slaughtered), veal calves are confined to stalls that are under two feet wide and just over four feet long. Veal calves are kept dangerously anaemic and prevented from moving to keep their flesh soft and pale; this involves depriving them of iron, so they are kept in wooden stalls and fed a liquid diet.

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The factory farming of dairy cows is also especially unethical. Typically, dairy cows are artificially inseminated, separated from their calves immediately after birth, and then artificially milked for ten months (during which they are artificially inseminated again just three months after birth). After approximately five years, most dairy cows are unable to produce enough milk to justify keeping them alive, so they are sold for slaughter.

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The farming of beef cattle is not as intensive as the factory farming of chickens, pigs, veal calves, or dairy cows; however, it is intensifying, and beef cattle are now frequently confined to small pens. To promote faster growth, beef cattle are usually fed grain instead of grass, which causes problems with their intestinal tracts. Beef cattle farming has proved relatively resistant to industrialisation, but, like fur farming, rabbit farming, and sheep farming, the introduction of factory farming processes is increasing.

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Despite reports and recommendations in the United Kingdom and the United States, factory farming has not improved much since 1975. In Sweden and Switzerland, a number of farming reforms have been enacted (including the prohibition of battery cages); however, the rest of the world lags far behind. Generally, legislation has attempted to prevent avoidable suffering (i.e. suffering than can be stopped without significantly decreasing profits).

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Other practices associated with farming are unethical; these include branding, castration, dehorning, ear notching, and tail docking. Transportation is also a serious concern: in 1986, over 1.25 million animals or animal parts were so badly damaged that they could not be sold for human consumption in the United States. Some animals are left in trucks for 72 hours without food or water, which leads to conditions like shrinkage and shipping fever.

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Although animal slaughter is supposed to be humane, it often is not. In the United States, the poleaxe (i.e. a sledgehammer) is still used to stun some animals prior to slaughter; because its efficacy relies upon the expertise of the poleaxe wielder, its use can go badly wrong. Additionally, halal and kosher slaughterhouses are not required to slaughter animals humanely; instead, animals are slaughtered with a knife whilst still conscious.

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Recently, scientists at Harvard University were granted a patent for a genetically engineered mouse that is particularly susceptible to carcinogens; consequently, agribusiness is increasingly interested in the potential for patenting genetically engineered farm animals. This process threatens to create farm animals that lead incredibly painful lives, because of the purposes they have been created for (e.g. extreme weight gain).

#### **4. Becoming a Vegetarian...**

If the consequences of speciesism are properly understood (principally, the pain and suffering caused by animal experimentation and farming animals for food), then becoming a vegetarian is the only rational response. Human beings are generally disinclined towards changing their eating habits; however, none of the arguments for eating meat are particularly convincing. Some suffering (e.g. castration, separation of family members, and transportation) is part of traditional farming, so prohibiting factory farming would not solve the problem entirely; additionally, traditional farming makes meat largely unaffordable. Likewise, the argument that meat on supermarket shelves should be eaten because it is already dead is ridiculously flimsy.

Vegetarianism is a form of boycott; however, unlike other forms of boycott, it has immediate effects: a reduced number of animals are born into a painful existence that is prematurely ended. Campaigning for improved animal rights without being a vegetarian is hypocritical; it is like campaigning against South African apartheid whilst asking the neighbours not to sell-up to black families. Although it may not be logically contradictory to eat meat whilst campaigning for improved animal rights (because, in theory, animals could lead pain-free lives and deaths), the inevitable consequences of farming make it impossible to maintain this position in practice. Additionally, the practice of meat-eating causes pain and suffering to human beings in less economically developed countries (LEDs).

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Millions of human beings in LEDs suffer from hunger and malnutrition. Factory farming meat, milk, and eggs contributes to this problem, because producing them uses more food than it creates. For example, beef cattle consume 22 pounds of protein for every pound produced, whilst pigs consume eight pounds of protein for every pound produced. Likewise, only approximately 10 percent of the calories in an acre of corn make it to a dining table if the corn is fed first to a farm animal. If the United States reduced its meat consumption by 10 percent, it would free up enough grain to feed 60 million people for a year. Likewise, halving the number of livestock in the United States would solve hunger and malnutrition in LEDs.

Farming meat also consumes large quantities of natural resources. For example, farming beef cattle in feedlots uses 33 calories of fuel for every calorie of food produced, and even the most fuel efficient form of farming animals for food (i.e. farming beef cattle on ranches) uses three calories of fuel for every calorie of food produced. Additionally, farming cattle uses large quantities of water (raising a 1000 pound cow uses enough water to float a battleship), and leads to the destruction of large quantities of rainforest (half of Central America's rainforests have been cleared for this purpose). Consequently, farming animals for food contributes significantly to climate change and pollution (not least because farm animals produce billions of tons of manure every year).

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A question arises if the argument against eating animals and animal products is accepted, on the basis that it causes pain and suffering; to what extent should one go to avoid eating such foods? As a minimum, everyone should stop eating chicken, turkey, rabbit, pork, veal, beef, and eggs, because, in MEDCs, all these foods are extensively factory farmed. Even though lamb is rarely factory farmed, people should probably give it up too, because farming methods are increasingly changing in this direction. Although people may think becoming vegetarian is a sacrifice, they may find themselves pleasantly surprised by the quality of vegetarian food.

The question of fish and shellfish is more difficult. Scientists have demonstrated that fish experience pain and suffering, so farmed fish should be avoided. Likewise, the practice of fish trawling causes large amounts of pain and suffering, because fish die long and painful deaths, and other species (e.g. dolphins) are harmed and killed in the process. Shellfish (e.g. lobsters, and shrimps) almost certainly feel pain, even though their nervous systems are very different from those of birds and mammals; and, whilst it is possible that molluscs (e.g. oysters, and muscles) do not feel pain, there is no way of knowing for certain.

The question of eggs, milk, and other dairy products is also more difficult. Everyone should stop eating eggs, unless they can find free range eggs (which is difficult in most parts of the United States). It appears that free range chickens do not experience pain and suffering during their lives, and do not mind the removal of their eggs. The equivalent farming of dairy appears impossible, because dairy farming requires some practices (e.g. separation of family members) that necessarily cause pain and suffering. Consequently, where possible, everyone should try to stop eating dairy products.

It is difficult to change long-held eating habits. People who make the decision to become vegetarian should consider doing so in stages. First, they should stop eating meat and replace it with plant foods; second, they should stop eating eggs, unless they can find free range eggs; and finally, they should replace dairy products with dairy-free alternatives (e.g. soya milk, and tofu), although they should not obsess about eliminating it completely. In brief, and for practical purposes, people should strive increasingly towards a vegetarian diet, but should not be disheartened if the process is slow or dairy products are impossible to eliminate entirely (due to their ubiquity).

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Often, people are willing to accept the case for becoming a vegetarian, but unwilling to become one. Usually, people fear that the quality of their dining experiences will be diminished, or that their bodies will be deprived of vital nutrients. In many cases, dining experiences are improved, because people expose themselves to a wider range of cuisines, especially from places where vegetarians are widespread (e.g. China, and India). In fact, people may increasingly get their protein from a wider range of foods (e.g. lentils, mushrooms, and soya beans), which may make for more enjoyable dining experiences. By comparison, meat often appears bland to people who have been vegetarians for some time.

In recent years, research has also shown that vegetarian diets have health benefits. A meat-free diet significantly reduces the risk of suffering a heart attack, or contracting various forms of cancer (including breast cancer, and bowel cancer). Generally, vegetarians have lower levels of cholesterol than meat-eaters, and live longer lives (numerous studies have shown this in various different contexts). Additionally, vegetarians can consume as much protein on a meat-free diet as meat-eaters do, and it is of exactly the same type and quality (only without many unhealthy fats found in meat). The only remaining objection is the fear that some people perceive vegetarians as cranks, but experience shows that this is unfounded.



## 5. Man's Dominion...

In order to put an end to speciesism, it is important to understand where it came from. Largely, it is a belief inherited from Western philosophical and religious traditions, many of which are based on assumptions we now know to be false. These traditions are Christian, and form a combination and evolution of the Jewish and ancient Greek traditions that preceded them. More enlightened traditions are those that managed to break from Christian influence.

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**Pre-Christian thought:** Jewish thought, as articulated in Genesis, makes clear that human beings are uniquely God-like, and required to rule over and subdue Earth. Despite some utopian visions (e.g. Isaiah), in which killing animals does not take place, the Genesis framework is assumed in the rest of the Old Testament. Indeed, after the flood, Noah is given express permission to eat other animals, and told they will fear him.

Greek thought is more diverse. For example, Pythagoras was a vegetarian, and advocated it through his school. Nevertheless, Aristotle was not a vegetarian, and believed animals existed for the benefit of human beings (just as slaves did, despite being human beings as well). Aristotle believed that less rational living things existed for the benefit and use of more rational living things, and this tradition was inherited by Christianity.

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**Christian thought:** Christianity inherited Jewish and Greek traditions, united them, and replaced Roman religion and tradition. Roman culture was especially violent; although citizens were well-protected by law, animals, military prisoners, and slaves were not. Christian beliefs in the sanctity of human life and the immortality of the human soul significantly expanded the Roman sphere of legal protection; however, animals still fell outside it. Additionally, a minority tradition within Roman culture was extinguished: concern for animals, as espoused by Seneca, Porphyry, and Plutarch, was disregarded, because the New Testament is silent on the matter.

The thought of Thomas Aquinas, as articulated in Summa Theologica, has had a particularly damaging effect on the consideration of animals in ethical decision-making. Following Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas argued that less rational living things (e.g. plants, and animals) exist for the benefit and use of more rational living things (e.g. human beings). He claimed that human beings are allowed to kill animals, because they can consider the justice of their actions; however, animals are not allowed to kill human beings, because they cannot (for this reason, he referred to such animals as "beasts").

Although some famous Christians demonstrated concern for animals, their concern did not lead to any consideration for the basic interests of animals. Francis of Assisi was known for his love of animals, but this love also extended to earth, air, fire, and water, and to the Sun, Moon, and stars. Francis of Assisi clearly experienced episodes of religious ecstasy; ultimately, these did not lead him to vegetarianism, or the promotion of vegetarianism for his monastic order. Pope John Paul II was the first Catholic leader to divert from speciesism, when he recognised animals as proper subjects of ethical consideration; however, this recognition has not led to any significant change.

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The Renaissance changed medieval Christian thought; however, it did not change it for the better. The rise of humanism elevated human dignity, but it did not elevate the dignity or moral status of animals. Nevertheless, at this time, some famous dissenters embraced vegetarianism and rejected the earlier arguments of Christianity regarding the ethical consideration of animals (e.g. Giordano Bruno, Michel de Montaigne, and Leonardo da Vinci). This created a minority tradition, which asserted that animals are intrinsically valuable and that killing them is wrong.

Unfortunately, the majority tradition in Christian thought took a different turn. René Descartes argued that animals are machines, and claimed they differ from human beings (which are not machines), because human beings are conscious and have souls. This argument led to the widespread belief that animals do not feel pain, and that the squealing or squirming of animals is just a mechanical response. This marked the nadir in animal ethics, as scientists across Europe began experimenting on animals without anaesthetics or any apparent concern.

**The Enlightenment and after:** ironically, the arguments of René Descartes eventually undermined the attitudes to animal experimentation they inspired. Animal experimentation revealed that the anatomies of many animals are similar to the anatomies of human beings; once revealed, Voltaire argued that it was unlikely that such similar anatomies produced dissimilar sensations (i.e. if human beings can feel pain, then so can animals). Other famous figures of the Enlightenment (e.g. David Hume, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau) agreed with this argument, and advocated for the better treatment of animals. Eventually, Jeremy Bentham argued that the capacity to feel pain should require the equal consideration of human beings and sentient animals in ethical decision-making.

Nevertheless, the realisations of Enlightenment thinkers did not immediately lead to any legal protections for animals. Eventually, in the early part of the nineteenth century, the United Kingdom passed some animal rights laws; however, they largely protected animals from damage (i.e. as property) rather than from harm (i.e. as sentient living things). Charles Darwin's famous works, *The Origin of Species* and *The Descent of Man*, could have significantly changed the situation, but they did not. Charles Darwin demonstrated that human beings are animals, and share a common evolutionary tree with all life on Earth; however, this discovery was not passively accepted. Many people, especially Christians, rejected Charles Darwin's conclusions; and even after they were widely accepted in theory, most people did not act upon them (i.e. become vegetarian).

In fact, the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have constituted two hundred years of excuses. Despite identifying the vital characteristic that requires consideration in ethical decision-making (i.e. sentience, or the ability to experience pain and pleasure), Jeremy Bentham continued to eat animals. Likewise, despite disproving the Christian belief that human beings are created in the image of God, and have the right to rule over and subdue animals, Charles Darwin continued to eat meat (additionally, he refused to sign a petition in support of the regulation of animal experimentation). Speciesism is ideological; despite the fact its foundations have been undermined, human beings continue to act as though they have not. Nowadays, some animals are afforded modest ethical considerations; however, ultimately, they continue to suffer and die to serve trivial human preferences.

## 6. Speciesism Today...

In effect, speciesism is the ideologically inspired disregarding of fundamental animal interests, in order to serve trivial human ones. Today, speciesism is perpetuated for various reasons, despite the fact it is clearly indefensible. First, children are introduced to meat at a young age, and, generally, adults resist any vegetarian tendencies. Second, adults and children are shielded from the realities of animal experimentation and factory farming. Children's books and television shows present highly unrealistic depictions of farms, and both the agribusiness and science lobbies conspire to keep farms and laboratories out of the media.

Finally, animal rights organisations are not particularly effective. When they were founded, organisations like the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, and the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, were more radical. As animal rights organisations have become more established, they have also become part of the establishment. In order to maintain their charitable status and increase revenues, many organisations have focused on trivial animal rights abuses (e.g. stray dogs), rather than more systematic animal rights issues (e.g. animal experimentation, and factory farming).

One common assumption perpetuates speciesism and is difficult to dispel: humans come first. Nevertheless, if the pain and suffering of animals is accepted as both easily avoidable and unnecessary, then it can be dismissed. Ironically, vegetarians do more to put human beings first than non-vegetarians, because their diets make more food available for human beings and reduce the impact of climate change.

Additionally, throughout history, people concerned with animal welfare have often been concerned with human welfare; this fact dispels the myth that people concerned with animal rights care more about animals than they do about human beings. Famous vegetarians and animal rights activists were responsible for successful campaigns to both abolish slavery and improve child welfare.



Several weak arguments are still used to support speciesism. First, some argue that animals eat meat, or that it is natural; however, some animals have to eat meat but we do not, and just because something is natural does not make it right (e.g. war, which may be natural to human beings). Second, some argue that farm animals have better lives than wild animals, but factory farming disproves this. Finally, some argue that existing is better than not existing; however, if conceiving a child guaranteed to endure a short and painful life from a known congenital disorder is wrong, then breeding animals for factory farms is also wrong.

The arguments against killing animals are more complicated than the arguments against inflicting pain and suffering on them, because it is possible to kill animals painlessly, and because human beings accept the killing of other human beings in some circumstances (e.g. abortion, and euthanasia). Nevertheless, prohibiting the killing of animals is probably necessary to elevate their moral status, because prohibiting the infliction of pain and suffering without prohibiting killing allows animals to continue to be considered disposable things. Such consideration is likely to perpetuate disrespect towards animals rather than ending it.

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Speciesism is so widespread that non-vegetarians often see no contradiction between eating meat and criticising practices like bull fighting or fur trapping. For those concerned with animal welfare, becoming vegetarian is important; it has an actual impact on reducing the pain and suffering of animals, and it makes it easier to convince others about animal rights issues (because it is consistent). Additionally, avoiding animal products is easier than ever before; today, there are ready alternatives to fur, leather, perfume ingredients, and more.

Since many vegetarians do not eat meat on account of the pain and suffering the practice causes to animals, non-vegetarians sometimes ask why they are happy to eat plants (because plants might feel pain). First, it is unlikely that plants feel pain, because they do not behave as if they do, they do not have a nervous system, and pain would not serve any evolutionary function (because they cannot move). Additionally, even if plants did feel pain, eating them would be better than eating animals, because eating meat is less efficient (i.e. more animals and plants are required).

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Generally, until the 1970s, professional philosophers defended the arbitrary use and abuse of animals by human beings; however, their arguments do not stand up to scrutiny. Importantly, philosophers who accept animal experimentation and factory farming do not accept experimenting on or farming severely mentally disabled human beings. The only defence offered is that human beings have intrinsic dignity or value; however, there is no justification for why all human beings have this protection but no animals do.

Since the 1970s, interest in the moral status of animals has increased, and animal ethics is now on numerous university philosophy courses. Additionally, a number of famous philosophers have revised their positions on the moral status of animals, and most now agree that using severely mentally disabled human beings for experimentation or food is as justifiable as using animals for these purposes. In a welcome development, philosophy has abandoned its lazy assumption that human beings are intrinsically more valuable than animals.

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The case for animal liberation is based on the claim that discriminating against living things because of their species is just as ethically indefensible as discriminating against human beings because of their race or sex. The argument appeals to reason, rather than emotion or sentiment, because reason is universal and less subjective. Additionally, the argument does not appeal to the health benefits of vegetarianism, because, even though health benefits have been documented, they are irrelevant to the central issue.

In recent years, the animal liberation movement has made significant progress. In Europe, numerous factory farming processes have been prohibited; most notably, veal crates (in the United Kingdom), battery cages (in Switzerland), and all forms of confinement (in Sweden). In the United States, animal experimentation is declining; major cosmetics companies have adopted other testing methods, and cruel and unnecessary experiments have had their funding withdrawn. Notwithstanding this, the future of animal welfare relies on the reasoned responses of individual people.

## George Thinks

Animal Liberation is widely acknowledged as the most important book in animal ethics. Even though Peter Singer admitted disappointment that it hasn't led to greater change, it's still responsible for huge advances in both animal welfare and applied ethics. Peter Singer identified the 1970s as a watershed moment for the animal liberation movement (between the 1970s and 1990s, almost three times more noteworthy works on animal ethics were published than before the 1970s); and much of this is the response to Animal Liberation itself (which was first published in 1975). Animal rights and animal welfare have increasingly become topics of political concern, and both vegetarianism and veganism are on the rise (although their purported health benefits have likely led to the recent increase). The remarkable thing about this book, is that it's generally considered to have won the argument (in theory, if not in practice): philosophers are now unable to uphold the principle of equality without granting equal consideration in ethical decision-making to some animals or withholding it from some human beings.

At this point, I have to confess that I haven't become a vegetarian, but I am seriously considering it. Part of my change of heart is due to the appalling revelations of Chapter 3; although I already knew a lot of the factory farming horrors outlined here, some of the particularly painful abuses were new to me. It's worth noting that chapters 2-3 (which are the longest in the book) make for especially difficult reading, and are certainly not for the faint-hearted; however, if you eat animals, you should probably know how they made it to your plate. Arguably, Chapter 2 (which covers the abuses involved in animal experimentation) is more gruesome, and I defy anyone who reads about the Draize Test or the Lethal Dose 50 Test to continue using cosmetic or household products that have been tested on animals. These chapters pose a real challenge to the way that most ordinary people live their lives, and go a long way to undermining the sense of lazy complacency that many of us have (including me) that what happens on farms and in laboratories can't really be that bad.

However, I don't think the boldest conclusion of the book is that we should all become vegetarians; I think it's that, if we don't, then we're no better than racists or sexists. And, perhaps more alarmingly, non-vegetarians have no consistent and justifiable reason not to experiment on or farm severely mentally disabled human beings (or even, perhaps, orphaned infant children), if they are prepared to do so to sentient animals. I suspect this is why Animal Liberation caused such a furore on its publication, and has continued to attract attention, comment, and criticism ever since. Yes, it lifts the lid on some particularly horrific animal welfare abuses in factory farms and laboratories, but it goes much further than that. It claims that anyone who eats meat or wears leather, and not just the farmers or scientists, is ethically responsible for a crime equal in magnitude to the hypothetical murder of billions of severely mentally disabled human beings or orphaned infants every year. If you're unhappy with that idea, then you should become a vegetarian. But read this book as well!

