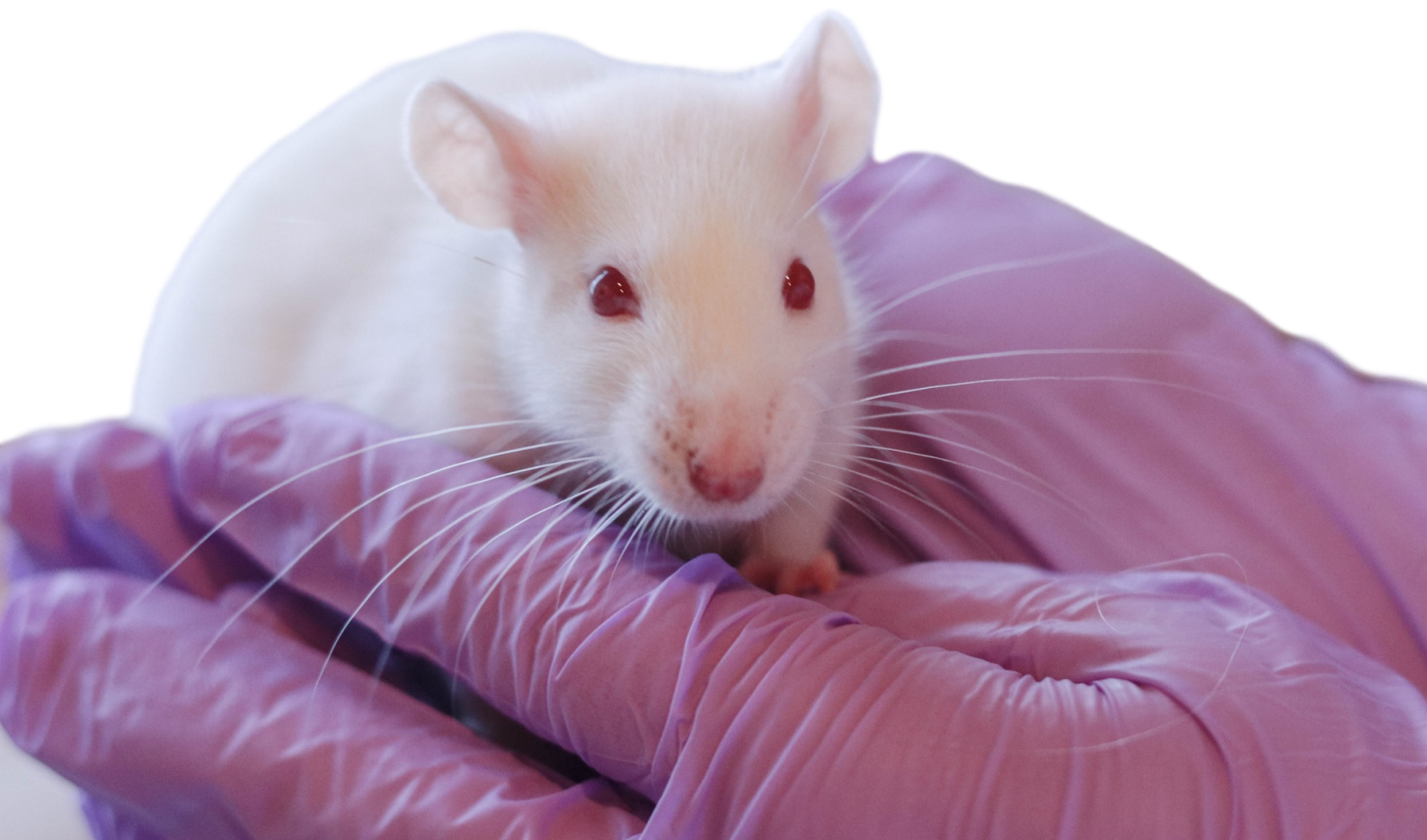


Ethics

Applied Ethics

Animal Ethics

Information Booklet

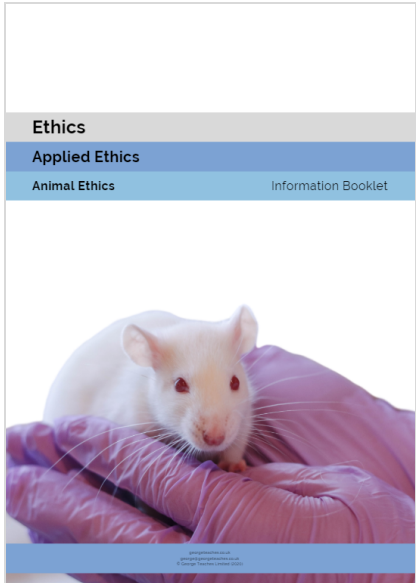


Preface

This information booklet is all about animal ethics. It surveys the important elements of this emotive and thought-provoking branch of applied ethics, introduces significant concepts and issues (like the use of animals for food, medicine and science, and sport), and investigates the ideas of the most famous thinker in the area, Peter Singer. It also covers how normative ethical theories (natural law, situation ethics, and virtue ethics) are applied to issues in animal ethics. It is an introductory text, but it provides useful pointers throughout for those interested in further independent study.

This information booklet follows the video lessons available at George Teaches, and is designed for use in conjunction with them. It is accompanied by worksheets that can be completed online or by hand, which are also available in a single work booklet. Additional materials on Peter Singer can be accessed online, which comprehensively summarise his famous work on animal ethics, Animal Liberation. Throughout this information booklet, key questions are used as subtitles, key terms are highlighted in separate boxes, and brief reflections are offered under the heading, "George Thinks".

I am deeply indebted to my colleagues and students for the production of this publication, which has been inspired by their desire for more extensive and holistic resources for teaching and learning about ethics. At all times, I have attempted to produce material that covers popular and important content, but is not confined by the straitjacket of any particular curriculum or specification. Consequently, whilst this covers all of the relevant content for animal ethics at A Level, it goes far beyond. My earnest hope is that it is capable of both supporting students of all abilities and challenging the most able to embark upon their own self-directed enquiries. Above all, it is my sincerest wish that it proves beneficial to both your teaching and your learning of animal ethics, be you teacher or student (or, as I am, be you both).



George

London, UK
10 April 2020



Contents



Introduction to Animal Ethics

4



Issues in Animal Ethics

6



Peter Singer on Animal Ethics

8



Natural Law and Animal Ethics

10



Situation Ethics and Animal Ethics

12



Virtue Ethics and Animal Ethics

14



3

Introduction to Animal Ethics

1. **What** is animal ethics and how is it approached?

Ethics is a large field that can be divided into three branches: applied ethics, meta-ethics, and normative ethics. Meta-ethics and normative ethics are both theoretical. Meta-ethics is concerned with investigating whether or not morality exists (i.e. whether or not the words "right" and "wrong" describe objective reality); on the assumption that it does, normative ethics is concerned with how to make moral decisions (i.e. how to decide which actions are right and wrong). Unlike these first two branches of ethics, applied ethics is practical; it takes normative ethical theories and puts them into practice in real-world situations. One of these is how to treat animals, which is also known as animal ethics.



Animal rights activists: a protest against animal experimentation.

There are two significant approaches to animal ethics, and every human being on Earth explicitly or implicitly adopts one of them. The first approach is human supremacy, which is the practice of using animals to serve the wants and needs of human beings (e.g. for food, and for testing cosmetic products). Most people in more economically developed countries adopt this approach, because eating animals and animal products is considered normal behaviour in these societies. The second approach is animal liberation, which is the practice of attempting to free animals from being used to serve the wants and needs of human beings. People who adopt this approach can take personal and nonviolent actions (e.g. becoming a vegetarian), or public and sometimes violent actions (e.g. vandalising laboratories).

2. **How** do the approaches to animal ethics work?

Human supremacy: people who use animals to serve their own wants and needs are inspired by anthropocentrism, which is the belief that human beings are the most important things in the universe. Some human supremacists justify their behaviour by arguing that ethical concerns are reserved for human beings, because they are human beings; however, this is not particularly convincing, because it is a circular argument. It is also a clear example of speciesism, which is the act of discriminating between different species despite their equal interests.

Other human supremacists justify their behaviour by arguing that human beings are unique, because of either their capacities or their personhood. In the past, some capacities (e.g. language, abstract thinking, and engaging in sex for pleasure) were thought to be unique to human beings; however, scientists have since demonstrated that other animals display them. Nevertheless, personhood may be uniquely human, because some philosophers ground it in the human ability to reflect upon thoughts (i.e. self-consciousness, or consciousness of consciousness). Some human supremacists argue that personhood distinguishes human beings from animals, requiring consideration of other human beings in ethical decision-making but not of animals.

Animal liberation: people who attempt to free animals from being used to serve the wants and needs of human beings are inspired by biocentrism, which is the belief that life is the most important thing in the universe. People

Applied Ethics

A branch of ethics concerned with how to put ethical theories into practice in real-world situations.

Animal Ethics

A branch of applied ethics concerned with the moral status of animals and how human beings should interact with them.

Anthropocentrism

The belief that human beings are the most important things in the universe.

Speciesism

The act of discriminating between different species despite their equal interests.

Personhood

The state of being a natural or legal person with rights and responsibilities.

who adopt this approach use a variety of reasons to justify their behaviour; however, the most convincing is that almost all the animals that human beings use for food and experimentation are sentient. Sentience is the ability to feel sensations subjectively, which makes sentient animals (including human beings) able to experience pain and suffering. Many advocates of animal liberation argue sentience is the vital characteristic that distinguishes between those things that should or should not receive consideration in ethical decision-making. For them, sentience gives rise to interests (e.g. the interest to avoid pain), and interests are the basis of legal rights.

Biocentrism

The belief that life is the most important thing in the universe.

Sentience

The ability to experience sensations subjectively (e.g. to feel pain).

3. Why are animal ethics and its approaches important?

In brief, animal ethics and their approaches are very important, because they affect how much pain and suffering animals experience. Human supremacists do not consider animals in ethical decision-making, which means their interests are entirely disregarded; at the extreme end, kicking a cat down a road for entertainment is no more ethically questionable than kicking a stone. People who adopt an animal liberation approach advocate for the elimination of pain and suffering from the lives of animals. Whilst this benefits animals, because their pain and suffering is reduced, it has consequences for human beings. In a world run by supporters of animal liberation, everyone would be vegetarian or vegan, and potentially life-saving animal experiments might be prohibited.

George Thinks

I think animal ethics is fascinating, because every day it raises an ethical question: should I eat this animal for my food? This question is an increasingly prickly one: science has already demonstrated that eating meat is unnecessary for our survival, and now it is increasingly showing that it's harmful to our health. Beyond these compelling reasons, factory farming is the only way of producing affordable meat, but its unavoidable byproducts include acute pain and suffering for animals, and the exacerbation of both climate change and world hunger. And yet I still eat meat! Despite the fact that animal ethics affects everyone on a daily basis, most people avoid thinking about it too much, which is as good a reason as any to start thinking about it now!

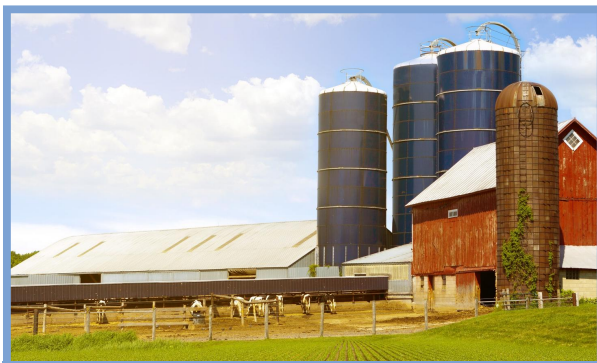


Issues in Animal Ethics

1. **What** are the key issues in animal ethics?

Human beings cause a lot of pain and suffering to animals; however, some human activities are especially harmful, and inflict considerable quantities of pain on millions or billions of animals every year. These activities are all key issues in animal ethics, because they stimulate significant debate about the extent to which human beings should be allowed to inflict pain and suffering on other living things. Although there are several key issues in this branch of applied ethics, three of the most important are farming, medicine and science, and sport.

Farming: the issue of whether or not human beings should use animals for meat and other products (e.g. eggs, and milk); and, if so, to what extent. Farming is harmful to animals, because it routinely involves confinement in overcrowded and restrictive cages (e.g. battery cages for chickens, and gestation crates for pigs), mutilation (e.g. debeaking of chickens, and castration and dehorning of cattle), and other problematic and potentially painful practices (e.g. in the egg industry, discarding male chickens into bags in which they are crushed alive).



A dairy farm: factory farmed cows are milked continuously for five years before slaughter.

Medicine and science: the issue of whether or not human beings should use animals for experiments in medical and scientific research; and, if so, to what extent. Animal experimentation is harmful, because it routinely involves inducing diseases in animals (e.g. cancer, and diabetes), or observing responses to shock inducing injuries (e.g. gun shot wounds).

Sport: the issue of whether or not human beings should use animals for sporting pursuits; and, if so, to what extent. Several sports culminate in the deaths of animals, which can sometimes be painful and protracted (e.g. bullfighting), whilst others are dangerous and routinely lead to avoidable injuries (e.g. horse racing).

2. **How** are the key issues in animal ethics approached?

The two significant approaches to environmental ethics are human supremacy and animal liberation. Farming, medicine and science, and sport are addressed differently depending on which approach is adopted.

Human supremacy: human supremacists are anthropocentric, which means they believe human beings are the most important things in the universe. They argue that human beings should be free to use animals as they wish, for both apparently vital purposes (e.g. food, and medical and scientific research) and relatively trivial purposes (e.g. entertainment). Generally, human supremacists argue that the interests of animals should not be considered in ethical decision-making, and that any use of animals is acceptable as long as it does not harm other human beings.

Animal liberation: members of the animal liberation movement are biocentric, which means they believe life is the most important thing in the universe. Moderate members of this movement argue that the interests of animals and human beings should be given equal consideration in ethical decision-making, but the use of animals is acceptable if it does not cause pain or suffering.

Alternatively, radical members of this movement argue that human beings should not use animals, even if the use does not cause pain or suffering, or the use will save the lives of human beings (something moderate members of this movement allow in exceptional circumstances). Radical members of this movement argue that human rights should be extended to animals.



Animal experimentation: a controversial subject in the animal liberation movement.

3. **Why** are the approaches to the key issues in animal ethics important?

The approaches to the use of animals in farming, medicine and science, and sport are important for several reasons. Arguably most importantly, the approaches influence what the lives of animals look like. Radical members of the animal liberation movement advocate for all animals to live free from human interference; moderate members of the animal liberation movement advocate for sentient animals to live free from human interference, unless the interference is painless or there are exceptional circumstances; and human supremacists advocate for human beings to have the right to use animals as they wish. Generally, members of the animal liberation movement work to reduce the amount of pain and suffering inflicted on animals by human beings, whilst human supremacists work to increase it, as a byproduct of exploiting animals for food, medical or scientific research, or sport.

Nevertheless, animal ethics is important for other reasons as well. First, the harmful effects of human activities on animals are pervasive; they affect billions of farm animals and hundreds of millions of laboratory animals every year, not to mention those affected by other activities. Second, animal ethics is potent; it boils the blood of a significant minority of people in societies around the world, and it provokes some to acts of vandalism and violence (e.g. the Animal Rights Militia). Finally, animal ethics raises problematic issues in other branches of philosophy: if God does not exist, then what makes human life more valuable than animal life? If their value is the same, why do human beings not conduct experiments on severely mentally disabled people instead of animals? In brief, the approaches are important because there are several potential responses and the problems they address are significant.

George Thinks

The issues in animal ethics expose an uncomfortable truth about modern life: it's intertwined with practices that inflict pain and suffering on animals. First and foremost, most people eat meat and other animal products, which perpetuates factory farming and the pain and suffering it inflicts on billions of animal every year. Beyond this, bullrings, circuses, and racecourses are responsible for a huge amount of unnecessary suffering, which is endured for the sole purpose of entertaining people. Likewise, laboratories injure and kill hundreds of millions of animals a year, and yet the cosmetics industry has demonstrated that most animal testing is avoidable, and the scientific community has admitted that the majority of animal experiments reveal little of importance.

However, meaningful change means making a lot of sacrifice. In brief, people would have to become vegetarian or vegan, forsake medicines approved via animal experimentation, and forgo traditional forms of entertainment widely thought acceptable. Actually addressing the issues in animal ethics requires radically adjusting our lifestyles, at least for most people. In fact, it's something I'm struggling with myself; although I wholeheartedly accept the ethical argument for vegetarianism, I can't quite bring myself to become one. Yes, I'm a monumental hypocrite; this is the only way of describing the difference between what I believe and how I behave. So, as you can see, these are the kinds of dilemmas that animal ethics puts us in!



Peter Singer on Animal Ethics

1. **Who** is Peter Singer and what are his key ideas on animal ethics?

Peter Singer (b. 1946) is an Australian philosopher and animal rights campaigner. He received a BA and MA from the University of Melbourne in 1967 and 1969 respectively, and a BPhil from the University of Oxford in 1971. In 1973, he had lunch with a vegetarian friend, and questioned him about his eating habits; this led to a conversation he describes as the decisive formative experience of his life. In 1975, Peter Singer published his argument for vegetarianism, *Animal Liberation*, which claimed egalitarianism should include animals (among other ideas outlined below).

The principle of equality requires consideration of animal interests: in ethical decision-making, all interests should be given equal consideration. Consideration should not depend on arbitrary characteristics, like race, sex, or species membership; therefore, egalitarian principles should be extended to include animals as well as human beings.

Ignoring animal interests is a type of discrimination against animals: the basis of all fundamental interests is the ability to experience pain and pleasure, which gives rise to the interest to avoid pain. Ignoring the interests of animals because of their species membership is just as unethical as ignoring the interests of women because of their sex.

Proper application of the principle of equality requires vegetarianism: human beings ignore the most fundamental interests of animals (i.e. to avoid pain and suffering) to satisfy their most trivial interests (e.g. taste preferences). Proper application of the principle of equality requires human beings to consider animal interests and become vegetarian.

Egalitarianism

The belief that all human beings are equal and deserve equal rights.

Vegetarianism

The practice of abstaining from eating meat, often for ethical reasons.

2. **How** do Peter Singer's key ideas on animal ethics work?



Peter Singer

Peter Singer's key ideas form an argument that calls for the consideration of animal interests in ethical decision-making, and the widespread adoption of vegetarianism. In *Animal Liberation*, Peter Singer attempts to establish that animal interests deserve consideration in ethical decision-making, because species membership is an arbitrary discriminator; that human beings who do not consider animal interests in ethical decision-making are speciesist; and that proper application of the principle of equality requires vegetarianism.

The principle of equality requires consideration of animal interests: Peter Singer's first key idea is that egalitarianism should be extended to include animals. He outlines and endorses Jeremy Bentham's utilitarian calculus, "Each to count for one and none more than one." However, he goes further, arguing that all interests should count in this utilitarian calculus, not just the interests of human beings. Peter Singer supports this claim with the argument that race, sex, and intelligence are arbitrary characteristics with which to justify ignoring the interests of some human beings in ethical decision-making; given this, he argues that species membership is a similarly arbitrary characteristic.

Ignoring animal interests is a type of discrimination against animals: Peter Singer's second key idea is a logical consequence of his first: if the principle of equality should be extended to include animals, then any exclusion of animals based on species membership is a type of discrimination. He attempts to establish that race, sex, and intelligence are arbitrary characteristics with which to discriminate between human beings; the essential characteristic is sentience (i.e. the ability to experience sensations subjectively, like pain and pleasure), and this is a characteristic that human beings share with almost all the animals they use in farming, medicine and science, and sport. Peter Singer claims that the basis of interests is sentience, and uses a comparison to demonstrate this: a stone does not have any interest in being kicked down a road, because it is not sentient; however, a mouse does have an interest, because it will experience pain if it is (consequently, it will seek to avoid this experience).

Proper application of the principle of equality requires vegetarianism: Peter Singer's third key idea is a logical consequence of his first two: if the principle of equality should be extended to include animals, because excluding them from it is a type of discrimination, then human beings should become vegetarian. In *Animal Liberation*, Peter Singer writes at length about the intolerable and inevitable pain and suffering inflicted by animal experimentation and factory farming, and establishes that even traditional farming involves a severe and unavoidable measure of pain and suffering (e.g. castration, and family separation). Furthermore, even if it was possible to raise and slaughter animals painlessly for meat and other animal products, the changes required in farming practices would render any food produced unaffordable. Peter Singer concludes that the ethical dilemma does not concern the question of eating meat in theory, but the question of eating meat in practice: presently, supermarket meat is not pain-free.

3. **Why** are Peter Singer's key ideas on animal ethics important?

They appeal to reason not emotion: Peter Singer's key ideas are rational, because they appeal to reason rather than emotion. He acknowledges that the issues in animal ethics provoke strong emotions; however, he deliberately builds a rational argument, because he believes that rational arguments are more convincing.

They reveal previously unknown realities about animal suffering:

Peter Singer's key ideas are built upon a revelatory body of evidence. Importantly, he uses evidence from the journals of both farming and medicine and science communities to expose the intolerable and inevitable pain and suffering of animals.



Fruit and vegetables: the basis of the vegetarian diet advocated by Peter Singer.

They are robust and well supported: additionally, Peter Singer's key ideas are methodically and systematically presented. In *Animal Liberation*, he carefully demonstrates that animals experience pain and pleasure; that this ability (i.e. sentience) is the basis of interests; and that egalitarianism requires the consideration of all interests in ethical decision-making (not just human interests). Likewise, the detailed and extensive documentation of animal pain and suffering leaves nothing to the imagination. Consequently, his argument is very strong.

George Thinks

Peter Singer seriously divides opinion. If you Google him, you'll find articles among animal rights activists that confer him saint-like status, and others among religious communities that condemn him. In brief, he's a controversial figure, and his critics accuse him of being dispassionate and unemotional. I don't know whether or not these apparent characteristics undermine his arguments though; if anything he accepts them, often claiming his arguments explicitly avoid appeals to emotion and sentiment in order to be clear and rational.

That said, they're often challenging and explosive, which may be why he upsets so many people. Famously, he argues that if it's ethically acceptable to end the lives of animals on farms and in laboratories, then it should be ethically acceptable to end the lives of severely disabled children. In fact, why not conduct the experiments that we presently carry out on animals on severely mentally disabled people instead; at least the results would be more valid. As you can imagine, this sort of talk is divisive, but it also helps to identify our hidden assumptions.



Natural Law and Animal Ethics

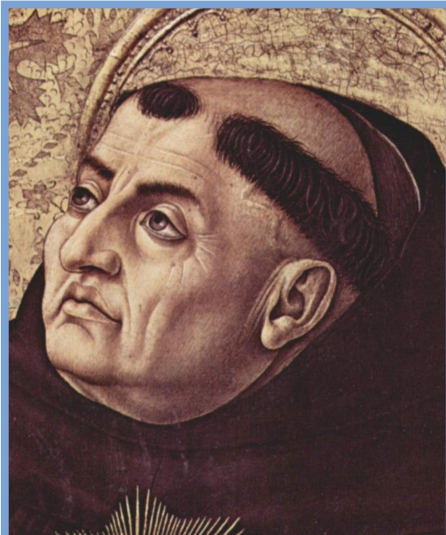
1. **What** is natural law and how does it work?

Natural law is a branch of normative ethics, and normative ethics is concerned with investigating different frameworks that help decide whether an action is right or wrong. Different normative ethical theories provide different frameworks for ethical decision-making, and natural law is one of these frameworks. Although natural law is referred to as a single framework, it is actually a group of frameworks, because various thinkers have presented different versions over the years. Among these are those presented by Aristotle, Cicero, and Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), whose version supports the Catholic Church.

Generally, all versions of natural law have two key components. First, they usually claim that what is natural is right and what is unnatural is wrong. For example, feeding soil to an infant human being is self-evidently unnatural, because it disagrees with human nature (the human body cannot extract nutrients from soil, so would starve and die on such a diet). Nevertheless, most cases are not as obvious as this extreme example, which necessitates the second key component: they usually claim that reason can identify what is natural in ambiguous cases. For example, Thomas Aquinas claimed that natural actions can be identified by thinking about how God intended the human body to be used. Consequently, both homosexual sexual intercourse and heterosexual sexual intercourse using contraception are unnatural and wrong, because they do not use the human body as intended by God.

Natural Law

A branch of normative ethics concerned with reasoning right and wrong from human nature (i.e. natural human behaviour).



Thomas Aquinas

Human purpose: the idea of human purpose is essential to Thomas Aquinas's version of natural law. He believed that God created human beings with a purpose (i.e. union with God), and that human nature (i.e. the human body) allows human beings to fulfil this purpose. Consequently, for Thomas Aquinas, the ideas of human nature and human purpose were inextricably intertwined, so natural actions are equivalent to actions intended by God. According to Thomas Aquinas, human beings were created to seek and achieve union with God, and human reason can be used to identify how to fulfil this purpose.

Hierarchy of souls: Thomas Aquinas based his version of natural law on the hierarchy of souls created by Aristotle. According to Aristotle, human beings have higher status than animals, and animals have higher status than plants, which justifies human use of animals and plants, and animal use of plants. Thomas Aquinas claimed the hierarchy of souls justifies human use of animals and plants to help fulfil human purpose, and the use of plants by animals to help fulfil their purpose. This idea is anthropocentric, and supports the subjugation of animals by human beings.

2. **How** is natural law applied to issues in animal ethics?

Farming: the issue of farming animals for meat and other animal products is a fundamental area of debate in animal ethics. Natural law considers farming animals to be right, because meat and other animal products feed human beings, which allows them to seek and achieve their purpose. Additionally, animals are lower down the hierarchy of souls than human beings, so their use is ethically unproblematic. Notwithstanding this, factory farming may be wrong according to natural law; if a clear link between factory farming and both famine and climate change is established, then it would be wrong as a result of the harm it causes to some human beings.

Medicine and science: the issue of animal experimentation is also an important area of debate in animal ethics, although it affects significantly fewer animals than factory farming. Natural law considers almost all uses of animals in medicine and science to be right, including xenotransplantation (i.e. the use of animal organs in human transplant patients). Again, fulfilment of human purpose and the position of animals relative to human beings in the hierarchy of souls justifies this use. Nevertheless, genetic engineering is prohibited, because it involves manipulating the God-given natures of animals or human beings (i.e. so-called "playing God").

Sport: the use of animals in sport is a more complicated ethical issue. Although natural law subjugates animals to human beings, it is only right to use animals to fulfil human purpose. It is not clear that the use of animals in sport helps human beings to seek and achieve union with God, and it is doubtful that God intended human beings to behave in this way with animals (which have their own God-given purpose). Additionally, Thomas Aquinas feared that violence towards animals might desensitise human beings to violence towards one another, which would make it wrong. Ultimately, natural law may permit the use of animals in sport, but only under certain conditions.

3. **Why** is the application of natural law to issues in animal ethics important?

The question of why the application of natural law to issues in animal ethics is important is really about why issues in animal ethics are important. First, issues in animal ethics are pervasive, because they affect billions of captive animals worldwide. Natural law accepts the use of animals in farming, and medicine and science; consequently, it offers little respite to animals or animal rights campaigners. Second, issues in animal ethics are potent, because they animate animal rights organisations. Natural law does appear flexible enough to permit reinterpretations, and in recent years the Catholic Church has condemned the needless death of animals, and practices like factory farming, in the name of natural law. It is possible these reinterpretations have occurred in response to the public mood. Third, issues in animal ethics are problematic, because they reveal human assumptions and double standards; however, natural law is unlikely to address these, because it relies upon Aristotle's hierarchy of souls and the anthropocentric belief that human beings are more important than animals (people are made in God's image unlike animals).

George Thinks

Thomas Aquinas's version of natural law is outlined in *Summa Theologica*, which was written in the thirteenth century. Animal rights campaigners often blame Christianity, and Thomas Aquinas in particular, for the treatment of animals in factory farms and laboratories across the Western world. Whilst it's true that natural law justifies human use of animals, the picture is a little more complicated; strictly speaking, it justifies human use of animals when such use helps to fulfil human purpose, and if such use threatens the fulfilment of human purpose then it's prohibited. Arguably, natural law is a victim of modern times, because it's hopelessly ill-equipped to deal with ethical dilemmas that Thomas Aquinas was unable to conceive of in the thirteenth century.

I never thought I'd end up defending natural law, but here I am! Think about it: factory farms and laboratories didn't exist in the thirteenth century, and farm animals led relatively pleasant lives compared with today. Yes, they were used for food and farming processes (like ploughing fields), but Thomas Aquinas actually advocated for their fair treatment (he cautioned against cruelty to animals in case it inspired cruelty to other human beings). On the subject of using animals in sport, *Summa Theologica* is silent; however, based on Thomas Aquinas's admonition against animal cruelty, it's almost impossible to believe he'd have approved of it. If anything then, the excessive cruelties inflicted on animals today can only be justified by a misapplication of natural law.



Situation Ethics and Animal Ethics

1. **What** is situation ethics and how does it work?

Situation ethics is a branch of normative ethics; like others, it is concerned with investigating different frameworks that help decide whether an action is right or wrong. Different normative ethical theories provide different frameworks for ethical decision-making (e.g. natural law), and situation ethics is one of these frameworks.

Although situation ethics is usually associated with the work of Joseph Fletcher (1905-1991), different versions were developed by different thinkers over the twentieth century, including Rudolf Bultmann and John Robinson.

Generally, all versions of situation ethics have two key components. First, the claim that established rules are usually right; and, because situation ethics was developed by Christian thinkers, this means Biblical rules in most cases. For example, the established Biblical rule prohibiting murder is usually right; but not always, because in some situations murder may be right. This introduces the second key component: situation ethicists claim that context affects ethical decision-making, to the extent that it dictates whether an action is right or wrong. For example, between 1974 and 1976, Joseph Fletcher was president of the Euthanasia Society of America; whilst he believed that murder was usually wrong, he argued that the situation (e.g. suffering from a terminal illness) may make murder the right and most loving action in certain circumstances.

Situation Ethics

A branch of normative ethics concerned with making ethical decisions by reasoning the best outcome of an action in any given context.



Jack Kevorkian: a famous supporter of euthanasia.

Love (agapē): the idea of love is central to Joseph Fletcher's version of situation ethics. He believed the self-sacrificing love of Jesus is the model for agapē, a type of selfless love identified by the ancient Greeks. In any given situation, Joseph Fletcher argued that the action that produces the most loving outcome is the right one. Although he believed following established rules in most situations will usually lead to the most loving outcomes, he argued that this is not always the case. Consequently, he supported practices like abortion and euthanasia when undertaken to produce loving outcomes.

Personhood: Joseph Fletcher argued that personhood marks the boundary of consideration in ethical decision-making; however, according to his definition of personhood, all animals are excluded from consideration. According to Joseph Fletcher, human beings have capacities that other animals do not, and these capacities entitle them to rights that animals are deprived of. Consequently, he argued that human beings can use animals to produce loving outcomes for themselves and other people. This idea is anthropocentric, and supports the subjugation of animals by human beings.

2. **How** is situation ethics applied to issues in animal ethics?

Farming: situation ethics considers farming animals for meat and other animal products to be right, regardless of the pain and suffering inflicted on animals, because it produces loving outcomes for human beings: people survive and thrive on eating meat and dairy products. Nevertheless, evidence of the harmful effects of factory farming on people living in less economically developed countries may make factory farming wrong. Factory farming appears to contribute to famine and climate change, and situation ethicists need to decide whether or not this contribution undermines loving outcomes for people in more economically developed countries.

Medicine and science: Joseph Fletcher supported the use of animals in medicine and science, and was a pioneer in the field of bioethics, because medicines brought to market through animal experimentation produce loving outcomes for human beings (i.e. cures). Situation ethics considers any use of animals in medicine and science to be right, including genetic engineering and xenotransplantation (i.e. the use of animal organs in human transplant patients), as long as it produces loving outcomes for human beings. Importantly, pain and suffering inflicted on animals in the process (i.e. loving outcomes for animals) is not considered in any ethical deliberation.

Sport: the use of animals in sport does not appear to be an ethical issue for situation ethicists; at least, not any more than the playing of other sports that do not involve their use. Unlike farming, and medicine and science, the health, safety, and survival of human beings does not depend on the use of animals in sport; therefore, the extent to which their use produces self-sacrificing love of the sort envisaged by Joseph Fletcher is either very limited or nonexistent. Additionally, situation ethics denies animals personhood, which means that the outcomes for them from using them in sport do not have to be considered anyway.

3. **Why** is the application of situation ethics to issues in animal ethics important?

The question of why the application of situation ethics to issues in animal ethics is important is really about why issues in animal ethics are important in the first place. First, issues in animal ethics are pervasive, because they affect billions of captive animals in factory farms and laboratories around the world. Situation ethics accepts any use of animals in farming, and medicine and science; consequently, it exacerbates the pain and suffering experienced by these animals. Second, issues in animal ethics are potent, because they animate animal rights organisations. Situation ethics can align itself with the concerns of animal rights organisations, but only if it extends the boundary of personhood to include at least some animals. Third, issues in animal ethics are problematic, because they reveal human assumptions and double standards; most clearly in the assumption that human beings should only be obliged to show love towards other persons (excluding even disabled people), which appears difficult to establish through rational argument.

George Thinks

A lot of people think situation ethics is soft and fluffy, especially when compared to other ethical theories that have a reputation for being inflexible (e.g. natural law). I suspect this arises from the emphasis on love in Joseph Fletcher's work; however, this permissive ethic grounded in personal conscience doesn't always appear to lead to loving outcomes. For example, Joseph Fletcher famously argued, "People [with children with Down's syndrome]... have no reason to feel guilty about putting a Down's syndrome baby away, whether it's "put away" in the sense of hidden in a sanitarium or in a more responsible lethal sense." You see, he didn't extend personhood to some disabled people, which raises real questions about how loving his ethical theory really is.

As I hope you'll agree, situation ethics is only as loving as the sphere of ethical consideration it extends this love to. Joseph Fletcher excluded animals and disabled people from consideration in ethical decision-making, which justifies inflicting pain and suffering on both these groups without any sense of guilt. In fact, and this may be surprising, situation ethics can be used to defend some aspects of the Holocaust (namely, the murdering of disabled people). Given this, situation ethics doesn't lead to any better treatment of animals than ethical theories like natural law, unless the sphere of ethical consideration is extended to include them; whilst it's perfectly possible to do this, it's not the approach that was advocated by Joseph Fletcher himself.



Virtue Ethics and Animal Ethics

1. **What** is virtue ethics and how does it work?

Virtue ethics is a branch of normative ethics, which is concerned with investigating different frameworks that help decide whether an action is right or wrong. Different normative ethical theories provide different frameworks for ethical decision-making (e.g. natural law and situation ethics), and virtue ethics is one of these frameworks. As a theory, it is most famously associated with Aristotle (385-323 BCE), although Elizabeth Anscombe and Rosalind Hursthouse revived it during the twentieth century, during which it experienced a renaissance of renewed interest.

Virtue Ethics

A branch of normative ethics concerned with making ethical decisions by reasoning virtues and acting in accordance with them.

Virtue ethics has two key components, which hold true however it is presented. First and most predictably, virtue is at the heart of virtue ethics. A virtue is a deep and positive characteristic, sometimes referred to as a "trait"; Aristotle argued that human beings can use reason to identify the characteristics or traits that lead to human flourishing (or eudaimonia). The second key component is action: although reason is used to identify virtues, this is not enough; human beings must cultivate virtues by acting in accordance with them. In fact, Aristotle argued that acting virtuously is an essential part of the process by which human beings can embed virtues more deeply in their characters, which is how to achieve human flourishing. In summary, human beings can use reason to identify human virtues, and become virtuous by acting in accordance with them to do good and flourish.



Aristotle

Human Flourishing (Eudaimonia): according to Aristotle, achieving human flourishing (or eudaimonia) is the ultimate objective of acting virtuously (or practising virtue ethics). He argued that human happiness and welfare, as eudaimonia is sometimes translated, is dependent upon reasoning virtues and acting in accordance with them; in other words, of developing and demonstrating deeply embedded, positive characteristics. However, Aristotle also acknowledged that other external factors (e.g. friends and wealth) can influence whether or not a human being ultimately achieves eudaimonia.

Hierarchy of souls: Aristotle believed in the existence of a hierarchy of souls, which gives higher status beings the right to use lower status beings. Aristotle argued that human beings have higher status than animals, and animals have higher status than plants, which justifies human use of animals and plants, and animal use of plants. Consequently, it is ethically acceptable for human beings to use animals in exercising virtues, which reduces them to little more than tools in the human pursuit of eudaimonia. This idea is anthropocentric, and supports the subjugation of animals by human beings.

2. **How** is virtue ethics applied to issues in animal ethics?

Farming: virtue ethics considers farming animals for meat and other animal products to be right, as long as farmers act in accordance with virtues (e.g. friendliness and liberality, in providing food for other human beings). Rosalind Hursthouse argues that acting in accordance with the virtue of compassion requires consideration of the interests of animals; consequently, factory farming may be wrong, because it appears incompatible with exercising compassion. Additionally, factory farming appears to be motivated by greed, rather than friendly or liberal concerns for other human beings; this is commonly considered a vice, which would make it wrong on a second count.

Medicine and science: although the actions of pharmaceutical companies may not be motivated by the virtues at an institutional level, the use of animals in medicine and science is acceptable to virtue ethicists as long as the doctors and scientists who experiment on animals act in accordance with at least one virtue. Practices like genetic engineering and xenotransplantation are usually undertaken with care and concern for other human beings at the forefront of the minds of the doctors and scientists involved. Ultimately, using animals in medicine and science is ethically acceptable as long as it is inspired by virtues.

Sport: the use of animals in sport is a more complicated issue for virtue ethicists, because whether or not it is right depends entirely upon which characteristics are identified as virtues. For example, Rosalind Hursthouse identifies compassion as a virtue, and exercising compassion precludes the use of animals in sport. On the other hand, Aristotle identified courage as a virtue, which some virtue ethicists use to support sports like bullfighting; however, this issue is further confused by those who claim bullfighting is actually inspired by the vice of cowardliness, because the odds are stacked so heavily against the bull.

3. **Why** is the application of virtue ethics to issues in animal ethics important?

The question of why the application of virtue ethics to issues in animal ethics is important is really about why issues in animal ethics are important in the first place. First, issues in animal ethics are pervasive, because they affect billions of captive animals in factory farms and laboratories around the world. Virtue ethics accepts any use of animals in farming, medicine and science, and sport, as long as it is inspired by at least one virtue; consequently, it exacerbates the pain and suffering experienced by these animals. Second, issues in animal ethics are potent, because they animate animal rights organisations. Virtue ethics can align itself with the concerns of animal rights organisations, but only by identifying more biocentric virtues, as Rosalind Hursthouse has attempted to do. Third, issues in animal ethics are problematic, because they reveal human assumptions and double standards; most clearly in Aristotle's hierarchy of souls, which attempts to establish that human beings have the right to use animals because their souls have higher status.

George Thinks

Virtue ethics is appealing to me, because it has surprisingly few rules. Unlike other normative ethical theories, it isn't concerned with establishing principles for ethical decision-making; instead, it's concerned with making human beings better people, and assuming that once they are they'll make good ethical decisions. In brief, virtue ethics has surprisingly few rules, because it doesn't need them; good people make good decisions. But there are problems, as you might imagine, and the biggest one is the virtues themselves. Not everyone agrees on the virtues that lead to so-called human flourishing; obviously, in the absence of such agreement, the whole enterprise becomes much easier to criticise.

As I hope you've worked out from what you've already read, the treatment of animals by virtue ethicists is entirely dependent upon the virtues they choose to cultivate. Rosalind Hursthouse presents an attractive proposition: she endorses compassion as a virtue, and argues that it's impossible to practise without considering other living things. She compares it to the Aristotelian virtues of friendliness and liberality, which can't be practised without considering other people, and does away with the hierarchy of souls. Personally, I find this incredibly attractive, because it manages to assimilate virtue ethics with a more progressive approach to animal ethics than it might otherwise encourage; but, of course, you'll have your own opinions on the matter!



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