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Research Essay: Animal rights

The issue of animal rights has been contentious for centuries. Several philosophers have presented theories to explain the mode of behavior that human beings should adopt with animals, starting from Aristotle. In the contemporary world, there are three main types of theories. The indirect theories, “direct and equal” theories and the “direct but unequal” theories. The indirect theories suggest that animals should not be given any moral status as they are not rational abilities. Most religious worldviews, theory for animal rights by Emmanuel Kant and the cartesian theories, follow such an understanding of animal rights. The direct and equal theories present the idea that since animals are sentient entities, therefore they should be considered, in essence, equal to human beings when considering their moral standing. Contemporary theories used by animal rights activists, form a major part of such theories (Pohl). The last type of theories presented over the years are known as direct but unequal theories. These theories suggest that animals do have a moral standing but that their intrinsic value should not be considered equal to human beings as they lack a rational thought process (*Animals and Ethics | Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*). I believe that the direct but unequal theories make the most sense out of the lot.

What makes the cutting down of a tree, much less of a crime than cutting down of a human being into two? I heard this question being asked once in a debate, in Speakers’ corner. A modified form of the same question makes the crux of the understanding of animal rights. That question can be formulated as, what makes human beings more valuable or different than animals or plants? If one can successfully answer this question, I believe that one can have a sound conceptualization of the issue. Before we get into the theory, let me clarify that the philosophical underpinning of induction exists in this theory, that is, in the future, a new research might appear and disprove parts of this theory or this theory as a whole.

There are three distinct types of living entities present on the Earth’s surface. Plants, animals and humans. We can analyze the similarities and differences between the three if we consider the properties of life, subjective experience and rational ability. Plants only have life while they lack in subjective experience and rational ability, as per the latest research. Similarly, animals have life and subjective experience while they lack rational ability. While human beings have all of the above-mentioned attributes. I believe that intrinsic value should be associated with the existence of these properties. Therefore, human beings should be given the highest value from a moral perspective, animals with the second highest, while plants with the least.

That does not mean to say that we should legalize deforestation or allow people to hunt for sport as that would be catastrophic for humanity, the animal kingdom and the plant kingdom. But the implications of this theory are that in scenarios where human beings require animals for food or transportation, they should be allowed to use them. At the same time, hunting only for the sake of fun should be banned in all circumstances. In cases where human rights and animal rights come at odds with each other, the moral preference should be given to human rights, as humans have the highest intrinsic value. Another reason for my belief in this theory is the implications of the other extreme narratives out there, such as those presented by the direct and equal theories. Such implications include overpopulation of animal species and the creation of imbalance in the ecosystem. Another line of argument, that can be provided in favor of this theory, is the argument from nature. A natural food chain exists in the natural world in which certain animals classified as herbivores feed on plants, while other animals classified as carnivores feed on these herbivores. Some of these animals are then eaten by humans, putting humans at the top of the food chain. An extreme approach towards animals can disturb this balance and destroy the ecosystem as a whole. An extreme abomination can increase the species of animals that human beings eat and thus decrease the other animals. At the same time, excessive hunting can cause extinction of certain species of animals. One thing that should also be take into consideration, while talking about animal rights, is the diversity of cultural and religious narratives around the globe, on this issue. This balanced approach will be the most fruitful and easiest in terms of implementation, as most cultures will not have any problem in accepting this methodology. Now, before someone accuses me of *argument ad populum,* that is to argue that since many people believe so therefore it is so (Weisberg). I should clarify that my argument for this theory is not based on this idea. But on the reality of cultural diversity around the globe, it should be considered in the debate of animal rights.

From a point of common sense as well, if a person makes a case for equal rights for animals, he should consider the fact that if his initial premise for the argument is that since animals are sentient beings, therefore, they should be given rights. Then using the same premise, one can argue that plants are living beings and that their feelings might be established by future research, and due to the same reason, plants should also be given equal rights. If one concedes to this argument, then the survival of human beings would be in jeopardy as human beings get their nutrition from plants and in some cases, animals. Such fundamental flaws in all of the other extreme narratives, compels us to take the middle ground and be balanced in the approach towards the issue of animal rights.

The best argument that can be presented against this theory is that of subjectivity. This theory leaves a lot of room for subjective interpretation. It suggests that the requirement of individuals for food and survival be fulfilled, but bans excessive animal hunting or torture. This short-coming can be understood very well when talking about the definition of requirement. The terms of requirement and excessiveness need to be defined in the book of law in clear wordings, for this theory to work. An example that can be used for the elaboration of the problem, caused by an ambiguous use of definitions, can be seen when a person who wants to slaughter animals excessively, might put an argument that he requires large amounts of cow skin to make the floormats of his car. Such an argument can place a problem in the hands of the court if the definition of such terms is not defined clearly.

This reasoning, however can be countered very well if the rule of law is used to regularize an interpretation of this theory and made known to everyone. The line of allowance that seems ambiguous can be made pretty clear if robust legislation is done in order to make the law as clear and well interpreted as possible. Another way to solve this issue is for the state to control all of the slaughterhouses and make sure that no other animals are being hurt.

Work cited:

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