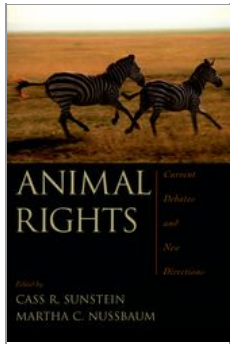


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## Animal Rights: Current Debates and New Directions

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## Eating Meat and Eating People

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### Abstract and Keywords

This chapter presents commentaries on Peter Singer's approach to animal rights. It contends that Singer's attack on 'speciesism' mischaracterises the moral issues at stake and contends that if people are to be on the side of animals, it must be for reasons different from those used by Singer and others who object to the current human use and mistreatment of animals. The chapter argues against the call to stop the killing of animals for food and the use of animals in scientific research.

**Keywords:** animal rights, Peter Singer, moral issues, speciesism, misuse of animals, animals for food, scientific research

This essay is a response to a certain sort of argument defending the rights of animals. Part I is a brief explanation of the background and of the sort of argument I want to reject; part II is an attempt to characterize those arguments: They contain fundamental confusions about moral relations between people and people *and* between people and animals. And part III is an indication of what I think can still be said on—as it were—the animals' side.

### I

The background to this chapter is the discussions of animals' rights by Peter Singer and Tom Regan and a number of other philosophers.<sup>1</sup> The basic type of argument in many of these discussions is encapsulated in the word *speciesism*. The word, I think, is originally Richard Ryder's, but Peter Singer is responsible for making it popular in connection with an obvious sort of argument: that in our attitude to members of other species we have prejudices which are completely analogous to the prejudices people may have with regard to members of other races, and these prejudices will be connected with the ways we are blind to our own exploitation and oppression of the other group. We are blind to the fact that what we do to them deprives **(p.94)** them of their rights; we do not want to see this because we profit from it, and so we make use of what are really morally irrelevant differences between them and ourselves to justify the difference in

treatment. Putting it fairly crudely; if we say, “You cannot live here because you are black,” this would be supposed to be parallel to saying, “You can be used for our experiments, because you are only an animal and cannot talk.” If the first is unjustifiable prejudice, so equally is the second. In fact, both Singer and Regan argue, if we, as a justification for differential treatment, point to things like the incapacity of animals to use speech, we should be committed to treating in the same way as animals those members of our own species who (let us say) have brain damage sufficient to prevent the development of speech— committed to allowing them to be used as laboratory animals or as food or whatever. If we say, “These *animals* are not rational, so we have a right to kill them for food,” but we do not say the same of *people* whose rationality cannot develop or whose capacities have been destroyed, we are plainly not treating cases alike. The fundamental principle here is one we could put this way (the formulation is based on Peter Singer’s statements): We must give equal consideration to the interests of any being which is capable of having interests; and the capacity to have interests is essentially dependent only on the capacity for suffering and enjoyment. This we evidently share with animals.

Here I want to mention a point only to get it out of the way. I disagree with a great deal of what Singer and Regan and other defenders of animals’ rights say, but I do not wish to raise the issue how we can be certain that animals feel pain. I think Singer and Regan are right that doubt about that is, in most ordinary cases, as much out of place as it is in many cases in connection with human beings.

It will be evident that the form of argument I have described is very close to what we find in Bentham and Mill; and Mill, in arguing for the rights of women, attacks Chartists who fight for the rights of all men and drop the subject when the rights of women come up, with an argument of exactly the form that Singer uses. The confinement of your concern for rights to the rights of *men* shows that you are not really concerned with equality, as you profess to be. You are only a Chartist because you are not a lord.<sup>2</sup> And so too we are told more than a century later that the confinement of moral concern to human animals is equally a denial of equality. Indeed the description of human beings as “human animals” is a characteristic part of the argument. The point being made there is that just as our language may embody prejudices against blacks or against women, so may it against nonhuman animals. It supposedly embodies our prejudice, then, when we use the word *animal* to set them apart from us, just as if we were not animals ourselves.

It is on the basis of this sort of claim, that the rights of all animals should be given equal consideration, that Singer and Regan and Ryder and the others have argued that we must give up killing animals for food, and **(p.95)** most drastically cut back—at least—the use of animals in scientific research. And so on.

That argument seems to me to be confused. I do not dispute that there are analogies between the case of our relations to animals and the case of a dominant group’s relation to some other group of human beings which it exploits or treats unjustly in other ways. But the analogies are not simple and straightforward, and it is not clear how far they go. The Singer-Regan approach makes it hard to see what is important *either* in our relationship with other human beings *or* in our relationship with animals. And that is what I shall try to explain in part II. My discussion will be limited to eating animals, but much of what I say is intended to apply to other uses of animals as well.

## II

Discussions of vegetarianism and animals’ rights often start with discussions of human rights. We may then be asked what it is that grounds the claims that people have such rights, and whether similar grounds may not after all be found in the case of animals.

All such discussions are beside the point. For they ask why we do not kill people (very irrational ones, let us say) for food, or why we do not treat people in ways which would cause them distress or anxiety and so on, when for the sake of meat we are willing enough to kill animals or treat them in ways which cause them distress. This is a totally wrong way of beginning the discussion, because it ignores certain quite central facts—facts which, if attended to, would make it clear that *rights* are not what is crucial. *We do not eat our dead*, even when they have died in automobile accidents or been struck by lightning, and their flesh might be first class. We do not eat them; or if we do, it is a matter of extreme need, or of some special ritual—and even in cases of obvious extreme need, there is very great reluctance. We also do not eat our amputated limbs. (Or if we did, it would be in the same kinds of special circumstances in which we eat our dead.) Now the fact that we do not eat our dead is not a consequence—not a direct one in any event—of our unwillingness to kill people for food or other purposes. It is not a direct consequence of our unwillingness to cause distress to people. Of course it *would* cause distress to people to think that they might be eaten when they were dead, but it causes distress because of what it is to eat a dead person. Hence we cannot elucidate what (if anything) is wrong—if that is the word—with eating people by appealing to the distress it would cause, in the way we can point to the distress caused by stamping on someone’s toe as a reason why we regard it as a wrong to him. Now if we do

not eat people who are already dead and also do not kill people for food, it is at least *prima facie* plausible that our reasons in the two cases might be related, and hence must be looked into by anyone who wants to claim that we have no good (p.96) reasons for not eating people which are not also good reasons for not eating animals. Anyone who, in discussing this issue, focuses on our reasons for not killing people or our reasons for not causing them suffering quite evidently runs the risk of leaving altogether out of his discussion those fundamental features of our relationship to other human beings which are involved in our not eating them.

It is in fact part of the way this point is usually missed that arguments are given for not eating animals, for respecting their rights to life and not making them suffer, which imply that there is absolutely nothing queer, nothing at all odd, in the vegetarian eating the cow that has obligingly been struck by lightning. That is to say, there is nothing in the discussion which suggests that a cow is *not* something to eat; it is only that one must not help the process along. One must not, that is, interfere with those rights with which we should usually have to interfere if we are to eat animals at all conveniently. But if the point of the Singer-Regan vegetarian's argument is to show that the eating of meat is, morally, in the same position as the eating of human flesh, he is not consistent unless he says that it is just squeamishness, or something like that, which stops us eating our dead. If he admitted that what underlies our attitude to dining on ourselves is the view that *a person is not something to eat*, he could not focus on the cow's right not to be killed or maltreated, as if that were the heart of it.

I write this as a vegetarian, but one distressed by the obtuseness of the normal arguments, in particular, I should say, the arguments of Singer and Regan. For if vegetarians give arguments which do not begin to get near the considerations which are involved in our not eating people, those to whom their arguments are addressed may not be certain how to reply, but they will not be convinced either, and really are quite right. They themselves may not be able to make explicit what it is they object to in the way the vegetarian presents our attitude to not eating people, but they will be left feeling that beyond all the natter about "speciesism" and equality and the rest, there is a difference between human beings and animals which is being ignored. This is not just connected with the difference between what it is to eat the one and what it is to eat the other. It is connected with the difference between giving people a funeral and giving a dog one, with the difference between miscegenation and *chacun à son goût* with consenting adult gorillas. (Singer and Regan give arguments which certainly appear to imply that a distaste for the latter is merely that, and would no more stand up to scrutiny than a taboo on miscegenation.) And so on. It is a mark of the shallowness of these discussions of vegetarianism that the only tool used in them to explain what differences in treatment are justified is the appeal to the capacities of the beings in question. That is to say, such-and-such a being—a dog, say—might be said to have, like us, a right to have its interests taken into account, but its interests will be different because its capacities are. Such an appeal may then be used by the vegetarian to explain why he need not in consistency demand votes for dogs (though even there it is not really adequate), but as (p.97) an explanation for the appropriateness of a funeral for a child two days old and not for a puppy it will not do; and the vegetarian is forced to explain that—if he tries at all—in terms of what it is *to us*, a form of explanation which for him is evidently dangerous. Indeed, it is normally the case that vegetarians do not touch the issue of our attitude to the dead. They accuse philosophers of ignoring the problems created by animals in their discussions of *human* rights, but they equally may be accused of ignoring the hard cases for their own view. (The hardness of the case for them, though, is a matter of its hardness for any approach to morality deriving much from utilitarianism—deriving much, that is, from a utilitarian conception of what makes something a possible object of moral concern.)

I do not think it an accident that the arguments of vegetarians have a nagging moralistic tone. They are an attempt to show something to be morally wrong, on the assumption that *we all agree* that it is morally wrong to raise people for meat, and so on. Now the objection to saying that *that* is morally wrong is not, or not merely, that it is too weak. What we should be going against in adopting Swift's "Modest Proposal" is something we should be going against in salvaging the dead more generally: useful organs for transplantation, and the rest for supper or the compost heap. And "morally wrong" is not too weak for that, but in the wrong dimension. One could say that it would be impious to treat the dead so, but the word "impious" does not make for clarity; it only asks for explanation. We can most naturally speak of a kind of action as morally wrong when we have some firm grasp of what *kind* of beings are involved. But there are some actions, like giving people names, that are part of the way we come to understand and indicate our recognition of *what* kind it is with which we are concerned. And "morally wrong" will often not fit our refusals to act in such a way, or our acting in an opposed sort of way, as when Gradgrind calls a child "Girl number twenty." Doing her out of a name is not like doing her out of an inheritance to which she has a right and in which she has an interest. Rather, Gradgrind lives in a world, or would like to, in which it makes no difference whether she has a name, a number being more efficient, and in which a human being is not *something to be named, not numbered*. Again, it is not "morally wrong" to eat our pets; people who ate their pets would not have pets in the same sense of that term. (If we call an animal that we are fattening for the table a pet, we are making a crude joke of a familiar sort.) A pet is not something to eat; it is given a name, is let into our

houses, and may be spoken to in ways in which we do not normally speak to cows or squirrels. That is to say, it is given some part of the character of a person. (This may be more or less sentimental; it need not be sentimental at all.) Treating pets in these ways is not at all a matter of recognizing some *interest* which pets have in being so treated. There is not a class of beings, pets, whose nature, whose capacities, are such that we owe it to them to treat them in these ways. Similarly, it is not out of respect for the interests of beings of the class to which we belong that we give names to each other, or that we treat **(p.98)** human sexuality or birth or death as we do, marking them—in their various ways—as significant or serious. And again, it is not respect for our interests which is involved in our not eating each other. These are all things that go to determine what sort of concept “human being” is. Similarly with having duties to human beings. This is not a consequence of what human beings are; it is not justified by what human beings are. It is itself one of the things which go to build our notion of human beings. And so too—very much so—with the idea of the difference between human beings and animals. We learn what a human being is in—among other ways—sitting at a table where *we* eat *them*. We are around the table and they are on it. The difference between human beings and animals is not to be discovered by studies of Washoe or the activities of dolphins. It is not that sort of study or ethology or evolutionary theory that is going to tell us the difference between us and animals: The difference is, as I have suggested, a central concept for human life and is more an object of contemplation than observation (though that might be misunderstood; I am not suggesting it is a matter of intuition). One source of confusion here is that we fail to distinguish between “the difference between animals and people” and “the differences between animals and people”; the same sort of confusion occurs in discussions of the relationship of men and women. In both cases people appeal to scientific evidence to show that “the difference” is not as deep as we think; but all that such evidence can show, or show directly, is that the differences are less sharp than we think. In the case of the difference between animals and people, it is clear that we form the idea of this difference, create the concept of the difference, knowing perfectly well the overwhelmingly obvious similarities.

It may seem that by the sort of line I have been suggesting, I should find myself having to justify slavery. For do we not learn—if we live in a slave society—what slaves are and what masters are through the structure of a life in which we are here and do this, and they are there and do that? Do we not learn *the difference between a master and a slave* that way? In fact I do not think it works quite that way, but at this point I am not trying to justify anything, only to indicate that our starting point in thinking about the relationships among human beings is not *a moral agent* as an item on one side, and on the other *a being capable of suffering thought, speech*, etc; and similarly (*mutatis mutandis*) in the case of our thought about the relationship between human beings and animals. We cannot point and say, “This *thing* (whatever concepts it may fall under) is at any rate capable of suffering, so we ought not to make it suffer.” (That sentence, Jonathan Bennett said, struck him as so clearly false that he thought I could not have meant it literally; I shall come back to it.) That “this” is a being which I ought not to make suffer, or whose suffering I should try to prevent, constitutes a *special* relationship to it, or rather, any of a number of such relationships—for example, what its suffering is in relation to me might depend on its being my mother. That I ought to attend to a being’s sufferings and enjoyments is not *the* fundamental moral relation to it, determining how I ought to act toward **(p.99)** it—no more fundamental than that this man, being my brother, is a being about whom I should not entertain sexual fantasies. What a life is like in which I recognize such relationships as the former with at any rate some animals, how it is different from those in which no such relationships are recognized, or different ones, and how far it is possible to say that some such lives are less hypocritical or richer or better than those in which animals are for us mere things would then remain to be described. But a starting point in any such description must be understanding what is involved in such things as our not eating people: No more than our not eating pets does *that* rest on recognition of the claims of a being simply as one capable of suffering and enjoyment. To argue otherwise, to argue as Singer and Regan do, is not to give a defense of animals; it is to attack significance in human life. The Singer-Regan arguments amount to this: Knee-jerk liberals on racism and sexism ought to go knee-jerk about cows and guinea pigs; and they certainly show how that can be done, not that it ought to be. They might reply: If you are right, then we are, or should be willing to let animals suffer for the sake of significance in *our* life—for the sake, as it were, of the concept of the human. And what is that but speciesism again—more highfalutin perhaps than the familiar kind but no less morally disreputable for that? Significance, though, is not an end, is not something I am proposing as an alternative to the prevention of unnecessary suffering, to which the latter might be sacrificed. The ways in which we mark what human life is belong to the source of moral life, and no appeal to the prevention of suffering which is blind to this can in the end be anything but self-destructive.

### III

Have I not then, by attacking such arguments, completely sawn off the branch I am sitting on? Is there any other way of showing anyone that he does have reason to treat animals better than he is treating them?

I shall take eating them as an example, but want to point out that eating animals, even among us, is not just one thing. To put it at its simplest by an example, a friend of mine raises his own pigs; they have quite a good life, and he shoots and butchers them with help from a neighbor. His children are involved in the operations in various ways, and the whole business is very much a subject of conversation and thought. This is obviously in some ways very different from picking up out of the supermarket freezer one of the several billion chicken breasts we Americans eat every year. So when I speak of eating animals I mean a lot of different cases, and what I say will apply to some more than others.

What then is involved in trying to show someone that he ought not to eat meat? I have drawn attention to one curious feature of the Peter Singer sort of argument, which is that your Peter Singer vegetarian should be perfectly happy to eat the unfortunate lamb that has just been hit by a car. I want to **(p.100)** connect this with a more general characteristic of the utilitarian vegetarians' approach. They are not, they say, especially fond of, or interested in, animals. They may point that out they do not "love them." They do not want to anthropomorphize them, and are concerned to put their position as distinct from one which they see as sentimental anthropomorphizing. Just as you do not have to prove that underneath his black skin the black man has a white man inside in order to recognize his rights, you do not have to see animals in terms of your emotional responses to people to recognize their rights. So the direction of their argument is: *We are only one kind of animal*; if what is fair for us is concern for our interests, that depends only on our being living animals *with* interests—and if that is fair, it is fair for *any* animal. They do not, that is, want to move from concern for people to concern for four-legged people or feathered people—to beings who deserve that concern only because we think of them as having a little person inside.

To make a contrast, I want to take a piece of vegetarian propaganda of a very different sort:

*Learning to be a Dutiful Carnivore*  
 Dogs and cats and goats and cows,  
 Ducks and chickens, sheep and sows  
 Woven into tales for tots,  
 Pictured on their walls and pots.  
 Time for dinner! Come and eat  
 All your lovely, juicy meat.  
 One day ham from Percy Porker  
 (In the comics he's a corker),  
 Then the breast from Mrs. Cluck  
 Or the wing from Donald Duck.  
 Liver next from Clara Cow  
 (No, it doesn't hurt her now).  
 Yes, that leg's from Peter Rabbit  
 Chew it well; make that a habit.  
 Eat the creatures killed for sale,  
 But never pull the pussy's tail.  
 Eat the flesh from "filthy hogs"  
 But never be unkind to dogs.  
 Grow up into double-think—  
 Kiss the hamster; skin the mink.  
 Never think of slaughter, dear,  
 That's why animals are here.  
 They only come on earth to die,  
 So eat your meat, and don't ask why.  
 —Jane Legge<sup>3</sup>

What that is trying to bring out is a kind of inconsistency, or confusion mixed with hypocrisy—what it sees as that—in our ordinary ways of thinking **(p.101)** about animals, confusions that come out, not only but strikingly, in what children are taught about them. That is to say, the poem does not ask you to feel in this or the other way about animals. Rather, it takes a certain range of feelings for granted. There

are certain ways of feeling reflected in our telling children classical animal stories, in our feeding birds and squirrels in the winter, say—in our interfering with what children do to animals as we interfere when they maltreat smaller children: “Never pull the pussy’s tail.” The poem does not try to get us to behave like that, or to get us to feel a “transport of cordiality” toward animals. Rather, it is addressed to people whose response to animals already includes a variety of such kinds of behavior, and taking that for granted it suggests that other features of our relationship to animals show confusion or hypocrisy. It is very important, I think, that it does not attempt any justification for the range of responses against the background of which certain other kinds of behavior are supposed to look hypocritical. There is a real question whether justification would be in place for these background responses. I want to bring that out by another poem, not a bit of vegetarian or any other propaganda. This is a poem of Walter de la Mare’s:

*Titmouse*

If you would happy company win,  
Dangle a palm-nut from a tree,  
Idly in green to sway and spin,  
Its snow-pulped kernel for bait; and see  
A nimble titmouse enter in.

Out of earth’s vast unknown of air,  
Out of all summer, from wave to wave,  
He’ll perch, and prank his feathers fair,  
Jangle a glass-clear wildering stave,  
And take his commons there—

This tiny son of life; this spright,  
By momentary Human sought,  
Plume will his wing in the dappling light,  
Clash timbrel shrill and gay—  
And into Time’s enormous Nought,  
Sweet-fed will flit away.<sup>4</sup>

What interests me here is the phrase “This tiny son of life.” It is important that this is connected in the poem with the bird’s appearing out of earth’s vast unknown of air, and flitting off into Time’s enormous Nought. He is shown as fellow creature, with this very striking phrase “son of life.” I want to say some things about the idea of a fellow creature.

First, it indicates a direction of thought very unlike that of the Singer argument. There we start supposedly from the biological fact that we and dogs and rats and titmice and monkeys are all species of animal, differentiated (**p.102**) indeed in terms of this or the other capacity, but what is appropriate treatment for members of our species would be appropriate to members of any whose capacities gave them similar interests. We are all equally animals, though, for a start—with, therefore, an equal right to have whatever our interests are taken into account. The starting point for our thought is what is general and in common and biologically given. Implicitly in the Jane Legge poem, and explicitly in the de la Mare, we have a different notion, that of living creature, or fellow creature—which is *not* a biological concept. It does not mean, biologically an animal, something with *biological life*—it means a being in a certain boat, as it were, of whom it makes sense to say, among other things, that it goes off into Time’s enormous Nought, and which may be sought as *company*. The response to animals as our fellows in mortality, in life on this earth (think here of Burns’s description of himself to the mouse as “thy poor earthborn companion, / An’ fellow mortal”), depends on a conception of *human* life. It is an extension of a nonbiological notion of what human life is. You can call it anthropomorphic, but only if you want to create confusion. The confusion, though, is created only because we do not have a clear idea of what phenomena the word *anthropomorphic* might cover, and tend to use it for cases which are sentimental in certain characteristic ways, which the de la Mare poem avoids, however narrowly.

The extension to animals of modes of thinking characteristic of our responses to human beings is extremely complex, and includes a great variety of things. The idea of an animal as company is a striking kind of case; it brings it out that the notion of a fellow creature does not involve just the extension of moral concepts like charity or justice. Those are, indeed, among the most familiar of such extensions; thus

the idea of a fellow creature may go with feeding birds in winter, thought of as something akin to charity, or again with giving a hunted animal a sporting chance, where that is thought of as something akin to justice or fairness. I should say that the notion of a fellow creature is extremely *labile*, and that is partly because it is not something over and above the extensions of such concepts as justice, charity, and friendship-or-companionship-or-cordiality. (I had thought that the extension of the “friendship” range of concepts was obviously possible only in some cases, titmice and not hippopotamuses, e.g.; but films of the relation between whales and their Greenpeace rescuers show that I was probably taking an excessively narrow view.) Independence is another of the important extended concepts, or rather, the idea of an independent life, subject, as any is, to contingencies, and this is closely connected with the idea of something like a *respect* for the animal’s independent life. We see such a notion in, for example, many people’s objections to the performance of circus tricks by animals, as an *indignity*. The conception of a hunted animal as a “respected enemy” is also closely related. *Pity* is another central concept here, as expressed, for example, in Burns’s “To a Mouse”; and I should note that the connection between pity and sparing someone’s life is wholly excluded from **(p.103)** vegetarian arguments of the sort attacked in part I—it has no place in the rhetoric of a “liberation movement.”

It does normally, or very often, go with the idea of a fellow creature that we do eat them. But it then characteristically goes with the idea that they must be hunted fairly or raised without bad usage. The treatment of an animal as simply a stage (the self-moving stage) in the production of a meat product is not part of this mode of thinking; and I should suggest also that the concept of “vermin” is at least sometimes used in excluding an animal from the class of fellow creatures. However, it makes an importantly different kind of contrast with “fellow creature” from the contrast you have when animals are taken as stages in the production of a meat product, or as “very delicate pieces of machinery” (as in a recent BBC program on the use of animals in research). I shall have more to say about these contrasts later; the point I wish to make now is that it is not a *fact* that a titmouse *has a life*; if one speaks that way it expresses a particular relation within a broadly specifiable range to titmice. It is no more biological than it would be a biological point should you call another person a “traveler between life and death”: that is not a biological point dressed up in poetical language.

The fellow-creature response sits in us alongside others. This is brought out by another poem of de la Mare’s, “Dry August Burned,” which begins with a child weeping her heart out on seeing a dead hare lying limp on the kitchen table. But hearing a team of field artillery going by, she runs out and watches it all in the bright sun. After they have passed, she turns and runs back into the house, but the hare has vanished—“Mother,” she asks, “please may I go and see it skinned?” In a classic study of intellectual growth in children, Susan Isaacs describes at some length what she calls the extraordinarily confused and conflicting ways in which we adults actually behave toward animals in the sight of children, and in connection with which children have to try to understand our horror at the cruelty they may display toward animals, our insistence that they be “kind” to them.<sup>5</sup> She mentions the enormously varied ways in which animal death and the killing of animals are a matter-of-course feature of the life children see and are told about. They quite early grasp the relation between meat and the killing of animals, see insect pests killed, or spiders or snakes merely because they are distasteful; they hear about the killing of dangerous animals or of superfluous pup pies and kittens, and are encouraged early to fish or collect butterflies—and so on.

I am not concerned here to ask whether we should or should not do these things to animals, but rather to bring out that what is meant by doing something *to an animal*, what is meant by something’s being an animal, is shaped by such things as Mrs. Isaacs describes. Animals—these objects we are acting upon—are not given for our thought independently of such a mass of ways of thinking about and responding to them. This is part of what I meant earlier when I dismissed the idea of saying of something that whatever concepts it fell under, it was capable of suffering and so ought not **(p.104)** to be made to suffer—the claim Bennett found so clearly false that he thought I must not have meant it. I shall return to it shortly.

This mass of responses, and more, Mrs. Isaacs called confused and contradictory. But there are significant patterns in it; it is no more just a lot of confused and contradictory modes of response than is the mass which enables us to think of our fellow human beings as such. For example, the notion of vermin makes sense against the background of the idea of animals in general as not mere things. Certain groups of animals are then singled out as *not* to be treated fully as the rest are, where the idea might be that the rest are to be hunted only fairly and not meanly poisoned. Again, the killing of dangerous animals in self-defense forms part of a pattern in which circumstances of immediate danger make a difference, assuming as a background the independent life of the lion (say), perceived in terms not limited to the way it might serve our ends. What I am suggesting here is that certain modes of response may be seen as withdrawals from *some* animals (vermin), or from animals in *some* circumstances (danger), what would otherwise be long to recognizing them as animals, just as the notion of an enemy or of a slave may involve the withdrawing from the person involved of some of what would belong to recognition of him as a human being. Thus, for example, in the case of slaves, there may be no formal social institution of the slave’s name in the same

full sense as there is for others, or there may be a denial of socially significant ancestry, and so on. Or a man who is outlawed may be killed like an animal. Here then the idea would be that the notion of a slave or an enemy or an outlaw assumes a background of response to persons, and recognition that what happens in *these* cases is that we have something which we are *not* treating as what it—in a way—is. Of course, even in these cases, a great deal of the response to “human being” may remain intact, as for example what may be done with the dead body. Or again, if the enemyhood is so deep as to remove even these restraints, and men dance on the corpses of their enemies, as for example in the 1970s in Lebanon, the point of this can only be understood in terms of the violation of what is taken to be how you treat the corpse of a human being. It is because you know it is that, that you are treating it with some point as that is *not* to be treated. And no one who does it could have the slightest difficulty—whatever contempt he might feel—in understanding why someone had gone off and been sick instead.

Now suppose I am a practical-minded, hardheaded slaveholder whose neighbor has, on his deathbed, freed his slaves. I might regard such a man as foolish, but not as batty, not batty in the way I should think of someone if he had, let us say, freed his cows on his deathbed. Compare the case Orwell describes, from his experience in the Spanish Civil War, of being unable to shoot at a half-dressed man who was running along the top of the trench parapet, holding up his trousers with both hands as he ran. “I had come here to shoot at ‘Fascists,’ but a man who is holding up his trousers is not a ‘Fascist,’ he is visibly a fellow-creature, similar to yourself, and you do not **(p.105)** feel like shooting at him.”<sup>6</sup> The notion of enemy (Fascist) and fellow creature are there in a kind of tension, and even a man who could shoot at a man running holding his trousers up might recognize perfectly well why Orwell could not. The tension there is in such cases (between “slave” or “enemy” and “fellow human being”) may be reflected not merely in recognition of the point of someone else’s actions, but also in defensiveness of various sorts, as when you ask someone where he is from and the answer is “South Africa and you do not treat them very well here either.” And that is like telling someone I am a vegetarian and getting the response “And what are your shoes made of?”

What you have then with an image or a sight like that of the man running holding his trousers up is something which may check or alter one’s actions, but something which is not compelling, or not compelling for everyone who can understand its force, and the possibility, even where it is not compelling for someone, of making for discomfort or of bringing discomfort to awareness. I should suggest that the Jane Legge poem is an attempt to bring a similar sort of discomfort closer to the surface—but that images of fellow creatures are naturally much less compelling ones than images of “fellow human beings” can be.

I introduced the notion of a fellow creature in answer to the question: How might I go about showing someone that he had reason not to eat animals? I do not think I have answered that so much as shown the direction in which I should look for an answer. And clearly the approach I have suggested is not usable with someone in whom there is no fellow-creature response, nothing at all in that range. I am not therefore in a weaker position than those who would defend animals’ rights on the basis of an abstract principle of equality. For although they purport to be providing reasons which are reasons for anyone, Martian or human being or whatnot, to respect the rights of animals, Martians, and whatnot, in fact what they are providing, I should say, is images of a vastly more unappealing sort. Comically unappealing, as we can see when similar arguments are used in *Tristram Shandy* to defend the rights of homunculi. But that takes me back to the claim I made earlier, that we cannot start thinking about the relations between human beings and animals by saying, “Well, here we have me, the moral agent, and there we have it, the thing capable of suffering,” and pulling out of that “Well, then, so far as possible I ought to prevent its suffering.” When we say that sort of thing, whatever force our words have comes from our reading in such notions as human being and animal. I am not now going to try to reply to Bennett’s claim that my view is clearly false. I shall instead simply connect it with another clearly false view of mine. At the end of part II I said that the ways in which we mark what human life is belong to the source of moral life, and no appeal to the prevention of suffering which is blind to this can in the end be anything but self-destructive. Did I mean that? Bennett asked, and he said that he could see no reason why it should be thought to be so. I meant that if we appeal to people to **(p.106)** prevent suffering, and we, in our appeal, try to obliterate the distinction between human beings and animals and just get people to speak or think of “different species of animals,” there is no footing left from which to tell us what we ought to do, because it is not members of one among species of animals that have moral obligations to anything. The moral expectations of other human beings demand something of me as other than an animal; and we do something like imaginatively read into animals something like such expectations when we think of vegetarianism as enabling us to meet a cow’s eyes. There is nothing wrong with that; there is something wrong with trying to keep that response and destroy its foundation.

More tentatively, I think something similar could be said about imaginatively reading into animals something like an appeal to our pity. Pity, beyond its more primitive manifestations, depends upon a sense of human life and loss and a grasp of the situations in which one



human being can appeal for pity to another, ask that he relent. When we are unrelenting in what we do—to other people or to animals—what we need is not telling that their interests are as worthy of concern as ours. And the trouble—or a trouble—with the abstract appeal to the prevention of suffering as a principle of action is that it encourages us to ignore pity, to forget what it contributes to our conception of suffering and death, and how it is connected with the possibility of relenting.

My nonreply to Bennett then comes to an expansion of what he would still take as false, namely, that our *hearing* the moral appeal of an animal is our hearing it speak—as it were—the language of our fellow human beings. A fuller discussion of this would involve asking what force the analogy with racism and sexism has. It is not totally mistaken by any means. What might be called the dark side of human solidarity has analogies with the dark side of sexual solidarity or the solidarity of a human group, and the pain of seeing this is, I think, strongly present in the writings I have been attacking. It is their arguments I have been attacking, though, and not their perceptions, not the sense that comes through their writings of the awful and unshakable callousness and unrelentingness with which we most often confront the nonhuman world. The mistake is to think that the callousness cannot be condemned without reasons which are reasons for anyone, no matter how devoid of all human imagination or sympathy. Hence their emphasis on rights, on capacities, on interests, on the biologically given; hence the distortion of their perceptions by their arguments.<sup>7</sup>

## Notes

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### Notes:

- (1) . See especially Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation* (New York: New York Review, 1975) [FIND IT @ HARVARD](#); Tom Regan and Peter Singer, eds., *Animal Rights and Human Obligations* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1976) [FIND IT @ HARVARD](#); Stanley Godlovitch, Roslind Godlovitch, and John Harris, eds., *Animals, Men and Morals* (New York: Grove, 1972) [FIND IT @ HARVARD](#); and Richard Ryder, *Speciesism: The Ethics of Vivisection* (Edinburgh: Scottish Society for the Prevention of Vivisection, 1974) [FIND IT @ HARVARD](#).
- (2) . “The Enfranchisement of Women,” *Dissertations and Discussions* (Boston: Spencer, 1864), vol. III, pp. 99–100. Mill’s share in writing the essay is disputed, but his hand is evident in the remarks about Chartism. For the origin of the remark, see also John Stuart Mill, *Collected Works*, ed. J. M. Robson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1963–1989), vol. VI, p. 353n.
- (3) . *British Vegetarian*, Jan./Feb. 1969, p. 59.
- (4) . *The Collected Poems of Walter de la Mare* (London: Faber and Faber, 1979), p. 129.
- (5) . *Intellectual Growth in Young Children* (London: Routledge, 1930), pp. 160–162.
- (6) . *Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1968), vol. II, p. 254.
- (7) . For much in this essay I am indebted to discussions with Michael Feldman. I have also been much helped by Jonathan Bennett’s comments on an earlier version of Part II.

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