

# AN EVALUATION OF THE THEORY OF ANIMAL RIGHT IN PETER SINGER

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## ABSTRACT

It is glaring that non-human animal have been exploited and annihilated in numerous ways by humans. This is a grave injustice that requires urgent retention and response, so as to protect animal rights and interest from oblivious mind. There are theories in the animal rights literature which have existed for some time now. Some against the protection of animal rights while some for the protection of animal rights. In line with the argument for the protection of animal rights, Peter singer an advocate for animal right protection argues in his book “Animal Liberation” that human should give equal consideration to the interest of animals when making decision to other species. He argued that the interests of every living being are the same. This work aims at examining and assessing the theory of animal rights in Peter singers. It sets out to clarify the absurdity that lovers around the protection of animal rights. This work adopts the philosophical method of analysis and evaluation. It exposes the historical origin of animal rights before the advent of Peter singer and even after him, Thereby using his thought to proffer possible end to the imminent sufferings caused by humans and animals. The only real way to protect animals is to assign them universal right under the theoretical concept of justice-observing animals right seriously means that by virtue of their existence (selfhood) and sentience they possess these right.

## INTRODUCTION

In our homes, our farms and dinner table, animals plays an important role in everyday of our lives. These animals serve as a source of livelihood to some person. They serve as a source of entertainment and companion to man. Some of these animals serve as food and cloth to human beings. Despite their usefulness to humans, they can and do exist on their own. That is to say they possess the quality of independence in their existence. Just like human beings are independent, so they are. These animals have interest within themselves, which includes protecting and defending it territorial habitation. This is applicable to both wild and domestic animals. These animals also mates like human being and gives birth independently. They care and nurture their young offspring.

Despite their utility and usefulness to humanity, they still share separate interest which is in accordance to the interest of the member of one's species.

As a result of these, the society is faced with legal, economic and ethical problems about the proper place for animals and the extent to which their interest can be protect even when those interests tends to endanger human life.

The awareness of these issues has given rise to a new social order which is the one that seeks to legally protect the actual rights of non human animals. This bold stride has amounted to series of criticism and mockery from those who believe the cost of animal rights specifically and an increased protection more generally, is a corresponding reduction in human freedom.

This work provides an overview of the issue at play which is the increased legal and social protections for animals. A discussion of animals right and well being is traced animals right and well being is traced back to the civil right Era down to the America culture of the animal right movement which was born in 1975 with the publication of Peter Singer's "Animal Liberation".

From the ancient Greek era, the proper place for animals and proper treatment of animals has been an age long debate. Despite the utility of animal to mankind, animals still have their own interest. Why can't human respect the interest and right, it is on this note that the society is faced with legal, economic and ethical problems of the protection of animals right and to what extent can their interests be protected despite the danger which some possess.

There is much disagreement as to whether non human animals have rights and what is meant by animal right? Animals rights teaches us that certain things are wrong, as a matter of principle, that there are some things that is morally wrong to do animals.

Accepting the doctrine of animal right means accepting the following:

- No experiments on animals

- No breeding and killing animals for food, or clothes or medicines.
- No use of animal for hard labour
- No selective breeding for any reason other than the benefit of the animal
- No hunting
- No zoos or use of animals in entertainment.

The following animals rights are not respected, the question is why is it not? It is in line with this that Peter Singer presents to his reader in his “Animal Liberation” the imminent sufferings endured by animals in the society by oblivious people.

Singer says that his book “Animal Liberation” is specifically to appeal to readers who were concerned about equality, justice and fairness. Singer is against this inevitable sufferings of animals, he said it is based on speciecism which is a prejudice or an attitude bias in favour of the interest of members of one’s own species and against those member of another species.

Peter Singer Moral argument advanced in Animal Liberation is based on the principle of Maleficence (“not causing harm”) and the principle of equal consideration of interest.<sup>1</sup>

Singer appeals that the non human animals interest should be considered. He argues for human to give equal consideration to the interest of animals when making decision to other species. The prime intent of this work is to point out the various rights of animals. It is also aimed at showing the proper place of animals and the extent to which their interest can be protected despite the danger in it. The frame work of this work is limited to animals right in respect to Peter Singer’s position concerning the imminent sufferings of animals by oblivious people. This work revolves around previous positions and claims for animals right protection and those against animals right protection.

It is important to know that through the study of animals right we will be enlightened to understand and learn that animals have right by virtue of their existence (selfhood and sentence).

It will be of paramount important because it will shape our mindset towards the way we subject animal to the burden of suffering, extinction and as a means to an end.

This work will also serve as a source of reference for students in philosophy who might consider it relevant in their research pursuit.

The principle of maleficence (not causing harm) and principle of equal consideration of interest as espoused by Peter Singer should be the yardstick for the protection of animals right.

This work adopts exposition, analysis and evaluative method of philosophy. Its source of data includes books, articles and the internet. This work will adopt the Chicago/Turabian style or method of documentation in its citation and general documentation.

**Animal right:** It denotes the philosophical belief that animals have rights including the right to live their lives free of human intervention. It is the belief that using animals is morally wrong. It is the belief that we should not use animals to benefit ourselves. We should always treat animals humanely and not inflict pain or death on animals.

**Extinction:** It is the act of making or becoming extinct or annihilation. That is to reduce to nothing.

**Animals:** This includes human and non-human.

**Non-human animal:** Is used to highlight the fact that human beings are also mammals.

**Non-Maleficence:** Means (not causing harm)

A cursory look at the status of animals in relation to humanity, we can deduce that the animal right issue is dated back to the ancient Greece greatest thinkers and not only a current trend issue in our contemporary society.

In the early part of this century the American Humane society undertook a nationwide education program to promote kindness to animals, based on the assumption that people who treat non-human animals well also will treat human beings well.

Recent information has provided some support for the assumptions. Studies of domestic violence have revealed cases where attacks against the family pet preceded wife abuse<sup>1</sup> and threat against pets have been used by child sexual abusers as a method of silencing children they assault<sup>2</sup>.

The animals rights debate is a long age one. This debate has resulted in two divergent views, those against the animals rights protection and those for the animals right protection. In the course of discussion in this chapter, we would view various perspectives concerning the debate.

According to Ryder, British Writer, Psychologist and animal rights advocate in his book "Animal revolution": changing attitudes is opposed to animal use in factory farming and animal research<sup>3</sup>. He criticized experiments on animals based on his own experiences in universities as an animal researcher. He believes we have an obligation towards animals which involves protection of animal rights. Ryder first became involved with animal rights in 1969 when he protested against an offer to hunt in Dorset<sup>4</sup>. Richard became known in the 1970's as a member of the Oxford group, a group of intellectuals loosely connected to the university of Oxford who began to speak out against animal use in research. In 1970, Ryder coined the term speciesism to describe the exclusion of non-human animals from the protections available to human beings.

According to David Decrazia, a moral philosopher specializing in bioethics and animal ethics. He is a professor of philosophy at George Washington University. He has been teaching there since 1989. He has authored and edited several books on ethics including: *Taking Animals Seriously Mental Life And Moral Status* (1996), *Human Identity and Bioethics* (2005), *Creation Ethics: Reproduction, Genetics and Quality of Life* (2012).

According to Stephen R.L. Clark born on Oct 30, 1945, a British Philosopher and Professor emeritus of philosophy at the University of Liverpool. He was known for philosophy of animal rights, philosophy of religion. He is the author of 19 books, including “The Nature of the Beast (1982), Animals and their moral standing (1997), G.K. Chesterton (2006), Philosophical futures (2011) as well as 77 scholarly articles and chapters in another 109 books<sup>5</sup>.

He believes that non-human animals have interest and those interests ought not to be discriminated against on the basis of species membership. He writes that we now know non-human animals to be much closer to humans than was previously thought and therefore similar considerations must be extended to them. He argues that the moral basis of humanism that is to say all human beings have equal moral status.

According to Tom Regan, an American philosopher in his book: “The case for Animal Rights (1983). He argued that non human animals are what he called the “subject-of-a-life”, just as humans are and that if we want to ascribe value to all human beings regardless of their ability to be rational agents, then to be consistent, we must similarly ascribe it to non-humans<sup>6</sup>.

He believes that in case when the animal poses as a threat, Humans have right to trap or hunt. He maintains that if that is done with the sole purpose of commercializing them or for the purpose of entertainment then it is against the animals rights principle.

Regan in conclusion believe that since both the human animals and non-human animals are “subject of a life” with inherent value, we should not subject animals to what we cannot subject man too.

In the book: “System of Ethics” of Leonard Nelson, he defended animal rights. He opines that despite the fact that man is at the helm of affairs of some other beings does not permit him to treat animal as a means to an end.

In his “System of Ethic”, he says

In other words we have to ask whether we would consent to be used as mere means by another being for superior to us in strength and intelligence. This question answers itself. The fact that man has other beings in his power and that he is in a possession to use them as means to his own ends, is purely fortuitous<sup>7</sup>.

He maintains that humans should not regard animal interests as inferior to ours without any good justification. According to Leonard, any time we are confronted with a conflict between our interest and that of animals, we should endeavour to scrutinize it properly on the scale of preference. For him, we should not regard at any point the interest of animals as inferior without good reason.

Leonard concludes that the human interest supersede animals interest when they pose as a threat. However we should not consider animal interest as less inferior without any reason to justify it.

There were four schools of thought that were influential in ancient Greece: animism, vitalism, mechanism and anthropocentrism. The philosopher and mathematician Pythagoras was the central figure with animism. He urged respect for animals, because he believed that humans and non-human had the same kind of soul, one spirit that pervade the universe and make us one with animals<sup>8</sup>. He said the soul were indestructible, made of fire and air, and were reincarnated from human to animal or vice versa. He believes that animals deserved some protections and as such choose to eat a vegetarian diet. He was reportedly the first animal liberationist buying animals from the market in order to set them free<sup>9</sup>.

Against the idea Aristotle (384-322BCE) argued that non human animals had no interests of their own, ranking for below humans in the great chain of being or scala naturalae because of their alleged irrationality<sup>10</sup>. He argues forcefully that humanity was superior to all other Earth life and that such responsibility carried with it no ethical obligations towards lesser creatures. Aristotle denied animals rationality and moral equality. "Plant are created for the sake of animals", he wrote "and animals for the sake of men"<sup>11</sup>.

Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832), a professor of law at Oxford University and a leading nineteenth century philosopher was known for working out the "principle of utilitarianism". He argued that the protection of any

creature should depend not on the ability to reason but its ability to suffer. Bentham is famously much quoted in animal rights for stating. “The question is not can they reason? Nor, can they talk? But can they suffer?”<sup>12</sup>

However major critics of animals argued that non-human animals are unable to enter into social contract and such cannot be possessors of rights. This is a view summed up by the philosopher Roger Scruton<sup>13</sup>. He writes that only humans have duties and obligation, therefore only humans have rights.

The issue of animal rights is a great controversy with divergent views and believes as explicated above. Further discussion will continue with preceding chapter in respect to Peter Singer's theory of animals rights.

### **PETER SINGER'S BACKGROUND AND INFLUENCES**

Peter Singer (6 July, 1946) is an Australian Moral philosopher. He is the Ira W. DeCamp professor of bioethics at Princeton University and a laureate professor at the centre for applied philosophy and public Ethics at the university of Melbourne. Singer's specialized in applied ethics and approaches ethical issues from a secular utilitarian perspective. He is popularly known for his book “Animal Liberation” published in 1975. Peter Singer belongs to the era of contemporary philosophy. Peter Singer's influences includes: Charles Darwin, John Stuart Mill. Henry Sidgwick, Jeremy Bentham and R.M. Hare. Singer also influenced Peter Unger, Colin M. Ginn, Roger Crisp, James Rachels.

On two occasions, Singer served as chair of the philosophy department at Monash University where he founded its centre for Human Bioethics. In 1996 he stood unsuccessfully as a green candidate for Australian senate. In 2004 Singer was recognized as the Australian Humanist of the Humanities, a private college in London, in addition to his work at Princeton.

Since 1968 he has been married to Renata Singer; they have three children: Ruth, Marion and Esther. Renata Singer is a novelist and author and she also has collaborated on publication with her husband<sup>14</sup>.



Singer's parent were Austrian Jews who immigrated to Australia from Vienna in 1938 after Austria's annexation by Nazi Germany<sup>15</sup>. They settled in Melbourne, where Singer was born. Singer's father imported tea and Coffee, where his mother practiced medicine. He has an older sister, Joan (now Joan Dwyer).

Singer attended Preshil and later Scotch College<sup>16</sup>. After leaving school, Peter studied law, history, and philosophy at the University of Melbourne, gaining his B.A. degree (Hons) in 1967<sup>17</sup>. In 1969, he received an M.A. degree for a thesis entitled "Why should I be Moral" at the same university of Melbourne. He was awarded a scholarship to study at the University of Oxford and obtained there a BPhil degree in 1971 with a thesis on civil disobedience supervised by R.M. Hare<sup>18</sup>.

After spending two years as a Radcliffe lecturer at University College, Oxford, he was a visiting professor at New York University for 16 months. He returned to Melbourne.

### **Influences of Singer**

Peter Singer's *Animal Liberation* is surely one of the cogent influential and effectual works of applied ethics ever published. Since its first publication in 1975, Singer's "Animal Liberation" has been read, and its main theses ardently debated by both professional philosophers and the readers with little interest in philosophy per se. There is no doubt that Singer's "Animal Liberation" has enjoyed an exceptionally broad readership and defends some unfamiliar and controversial theses.

He was one of the founders of the modern intellectual movement for Animals rights in line with the principle of Maleficence and principle of equal moral consideration.

Singer names R.M. Hare and Australian Philosopher H.J. McCloskey as his two most important mentors. He accidentally met Richard Keshen a fellow graduate whom engaged him in a discussion. Richard Keshen, a Canadian during lunch opted with Singer to have a salad after being told that the Spaghetti sauce contained meat. Singer had the spaghetti – Singer questioned Keshen for his reason for avoiding meat. Keshen explained his ethical objections. Keshen later introduced Singer to his vegetarian friends. After a week or two he approached

his wife-saying that he thought they needed to make a change to their diet, and that he didn't think they could justify eating meat.

In 1970, the term speciecism was coined by Ryder Richard D. to describe the exclusion of non human animals from the protections available to human beings. Singer adopted the term "speciecism" which he later popularized in his book "Animal Liberation". For Singer, "speciecism" is the prejudice or attitude bias in favour of the interest of members of one's own species and against those members of another species.

Singer was able to read Ruth Harrison's work titled "Animal Machines" which attacked factory farming by use of animal. This actual inspired his work "Animal liberation". Among his work include: practical ethics, the life you can save.

### **Singer's Principle of Maleficence and Principle of Equal Moral Consideration of Interest**

The principle of Maleficence (means not causing harm) and the principle of equal consideration are the two moral arguments that were advanced by the "Animal Liberation" book of singer.

Singer is of the notion that pain should not be inflicted on any being. For him every being both human animals and non-human animals feel pain or pleasure. Singer says that there can be no moral justification for regarding the pain or pleasure that animal feels as less important than the same amount of pain or please fell by human

If I give a horse a hard slap across its rump with open hand, the horse may start, but it presumably still feels little pain ... if I slap a baby in the same way, however, the baby will cry and presumably feel pain, for its skin is more sensitive. So it is worse to slap a baby than a horse. If both slaps are administered with equal force.<sup>19</sup>.

Singer compared speciecism with racism and sexism, just like human crave for equal moral consideration with other race and sex (masculine and feminine) for there is no good reason for refusing to extend the base principle of moral equality and consideration of interest to non human animals<sup>20</sup>.

This idea of the principle of equal consideration of interest of other species stems out of his concept of animals as sentient beings. Singer in accordance to Jeremy Bentham claim which state that “the question is not, can they reason? Nor can they talk? But can they suffer?”<sup>21</sup>

According to Peter Singer in his “practical ethics” opines: “The capacity for suffering and enjoying things is a prerequisite for having interest at all, a condition that must be satisfied before we can speak of interest in any meaningfully way”<sup>22</sup>.

### **The Concept of Specieism in Singer**

In 1970, the word “Specieism” was coined by Ryder Richard to describe the exclusion of non-human animals from the protections available to human beings.

Singer describes specieism as the prejudice and bias attitude in favour of the interest of the member of one’s own specie against the interest of the member of another. Singer advocates that human animals should give equal moral consideration to the interest of animals when making decision to other species. Singer maintains that the interests of every being are the same.

Specieism for him can be compared to racism. According to him: giving preference to a beings life on the bases that such being is a member of our specie will only put us on the same footings as racist who do same on the ground of same race<sup>23</sup>.

It is based on specieism that we give preference to human over animal and at such we prefer using animals for the purpose experiment leading to the discovery of a drug that will be beneficial to man.

He also maintained that base on the principle of equal moral consideration of interest, if we are ready to use animal for the benefit of humans, we should deem it fit also to use severely mentally disordered humans as well as infants for the same experiment for the benefit of non-human animals.

### **Singer’s Condition for Animals Right**

Singer speaks on the condition of animal right based on the principle of Maleficence and principle of equal moral consideration of interest. Singer as an animal right advocate emphasized on the equal consideration of animal interest and not based on equal treatment. There is a clear distinction between animal right position and the welfare position.

Singer maintains that animals are sentient beings that feel pain as well as pleasure. So we are bound to extend moral consideration of interest towards animals. Singer in line with Jeremy Bentham believes that it is not the question of reasoning or speak but is the question can they suffer. The notion of reasoning and speech as a criteria to subject animals right is what Singers is opposed too.

Singer upholds that our treatment of non human animals specifically those that do not share the same characteristics with a person is permissible so far their death does not involve suffering. This position of singer emanated from the discussion that beings who are not rational and self conscious, aware of themselves as distinct entities with a past and a future<sup>24</sup> otherwise known as a person are replaceable because they do not have future plans and self-consciousness. This actually for him does not mean that their interests do not matter. He advocates finally thus regarding this:

In any case, at the practical moral principles, it would be better to reject altogether the killing of animals for food, unless one must do so to survive. Killing animal for food makes use to think of them as objects that we can use as we please. Their lives then count for little when weighed against our mere wants. As long as we continue to use animals in this way, to change our attitudes to animals in the way that they should be changed will be an impossible task<sup>25</sup>

In respect to animal who do not share the same characteristics to human, Singer is trying to point out that the intent of the act should be based on the fact that it is necessary and not based on want.

In cases where the animal shares the same characteristics such as Gorillas and chimpanzees etc, it is evidence that they should be classified as a person Singer in conclusion opines that we should extend equal moral consideration to non-human animals but that does not mean treating them equal.

### **Argument against Singer's Animals Right**

There are so many critics as against the protection of animals rights. The British philosopher and writer Roger Scruton presented his argument against Animal rights. He admitted that animals should not be treated with disdain. However, this position of him turns out to be contradictory with his believe that animal should not be granted equal moral consideration.

In his book titled *Animal Rights and Wrongs*, he based his argument on what he tagged Moral being which he maintains that animals does not qualify into moral being, he maintained that those beings which he called moral beings are person and hence constitute free community and should be able to be engaged in dialogue, rational dialogue, being able to make choice, act intentionally in pursuit of their goals and take responsibility for the outcome<sup>26</sup>.

He opines that “there is no doubt in my mind that animals do not form moral communities of the kind I have been describing”<sup>27</sup>, Scruton admitted that animals can suffer when he said that it is hard to deny that suffer is morally significant and that animals do actually experience it and as such, the deliberate infliction of pain on them without cause is wrong<sup>28</sup>.

However, he was inconsistent when he dismissed the basis of suffering also the criteria for equal moral consider of interest.

Scruton analyzing Singer argument against speciecism. Singer pointed out that we refuse to use infant and severely disciple people for experiment on the basis of that we share the same specie with them, so we choose to use animals, this is what singer describe as speciecism. That is giving preference to one’ being because of some species against other species. Scruton addressed those category of humans as “marginal human”, he maintains that infants are human in potency, pre-human and hence there is no moral distinction between them and human adults.

Scruton in this his argument goes further to showcase our superiority towards other animals. This last argument presented by Scruton, cannot but be seen as another form “speciecism:.

Singer's early position against speciecism say that if we are ready to use non-human animals for experiment on the ground that they are not dreaded by what happens to them, we should be ready to use infant and severely mentally human for animal for same experiment because as far as this argument is concerned, they are in the same category with the animals, but if we are not ready to do same to them, he questioned on what ground can it be other than on morally indefensible preference for members of our own species?<sup>29</sup>

Scruton was quick to dismiss suffering as not being sufficient condition for granting animals moral consideration due to them. The sufficient conditions are reason, language, future awareness, remembering of the past. This also cannot be possessed by both infants and mentally disabled adults.

## EVALUATION AND CONCLUSION

The principle of maleficence and principle of equal moral consideration of interest which was advanced by Peter singer in his "Animal Liberation" as a defense of animals rights, has made explicit the imminent suffering faced by animals in the hands of oblivious mind.

Singer made it clear that it is due to the concept "speciecism" which he describes as a prejudice or bias attitude in favour of an interest of a member of one's specie against the interest of other species. He made it clear that we humiliate non-human animals by giving preference to our being because we share membership of our species against other species (animal). Doing this would put us on the same footing with racists and sexist, we are discriminating non-human animals on the basis of specie.

Singer opposition towards the experimentation of animals makes us understand that we inflict pain on our fellow sentient being under the umbrella of research for solving human problems precisely medical ones and for the purpose of human knowledge. This we actually do without equal consider of interest. When we conduct an experiment from the basis of speciecism it then shows our lack of equal consideration of interest. Singer carefully explains using examples of infant and severely mentally disabled adults, he argues that since we are so sentimental and we cannot use them perform experiment for the purpose of increase in human

knowledge not to talk of medical purpose because we share the same specie with them point out that we are caught in this act of speciecism, racism and sexism.

From Peter Singers view on animals rights. He maintains that it is very important for the oblivious mind to reevaluate their actions towards animals. He maintains that every being is a sentient being and that should be basis for the equal consideration of interests.

### **Conclusion**

The preceding discussion was aimed at revealing the rights of non human animals in conjunction with Peter singer theory of animal right using the principle of maleficence and principle of equal moral consideration of interest.

Having notice Singer's opposition towards the use of animals in factory farming and experiments. We would realize that such act of oblivious mind is based on speciecism. However, he maintains that every being are sentient beings that is beings that feels pain or pleasure. He said that this should be the basis of the equal consideration of interest. It should not be discriminated on the basis of reason and speech. This evaluation of Singers position will enable the oblivious mind reevaluate their actions towards animals by placing additional value to them. He maintains that the right he is advocating for animal is the right of equal consideration of interest.

In my own position, I have to make some salient point. For the fact we reason and speak does not give us an upper edge over animals because we don't share membership of their specie. Thinking of what we have over animals, we should also think of theirs when we say animals do not reason and speak, I will be forced to ask why do we think so. For us to understand it better we should define reason and speech? Reason can be defined as rational thinking or the capacity of making judgment, deduction and intuition. Speech is defined as the ability to speak or to use vocalizations to communicate. Looking at the word vocalization we would understand that it is the act of vocalizing or something vocalized, a voice utterance. Taking a look at it, it is the

capacity of making judgment and an intuition (immediate cognition without the use of conscious rational processes).

From the above definition, I believe that non-human animal reason and speak in conformity to the membership of their species. Seeing reason and speech as upper edge over animal which should think and understand that there are other upper edge which non-human animals have over human. For the fact we understand within our specie that we reason and speak is because we share of the same specie, so we should not conclude that of animal because we do not share the same specie with them.

Giving preference to our being over other being because we share in the same specie will put us on the same footing with racist. Just like human animal eat, sleep, mate, solve their problem that is the same way non-human animals behave.

However from the hierarchical order of being, the thinking being (human) is higher than the animate being (non-human being). This is because of the thinking faculty.

In conclusion, I will join scholars in the animal rights debate who thinks that animals like human should be granted basic universal right by virtue of their selfhood and sentence. The only real way to protect animals right is to assign to them universal declaration of animal right using the theoretical framework of justice.

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