

'Does Peter Singer's Account Of Speciesism Provide An Accurate Account Of Our Society's Moral Relationship Towards Animals?'

Peter Singer's account of speciesism has become one of the most influential attempts to explain the moral structure of modern human relationships with non-human animals. Building on the term first introduced by Richard D. Ryder,¹ Singer argues that contemporary societies systematically privilege human interests over comparable animal interests in ways analogous to racism and sexism, despite their professed commitment to giving equal consideration to suffering wherever it occurs. Within this framework, practices such as factory farming, animal experimentation, and the routine prioritisation of human convenience over animal welfare appear as expressions of a pervasive prejudice embedded within ordinary moral judgement.

This essay argues that Singer's diagnosis is both powerful and incomplete. It is powerful because it identifies genuine tensions within contemporary moral practice, particularly where serious animal suffering is subordinated to comparatively minor human benefits; it is incomplete because interpreting those tensions as evidence of species prejudice presupposes a moral framework in which suffering alone determines moral standing. Drawing on developments within analytic animal ethics and the classical metaphysical principle that goodness is convertible with being, this essay proposes instead that moral differentiation between forms of life reflects a graded order of participation in reality rather than arbitrary species preference. Singer therefore identifies a real tension within modern moral practice but misinterprets its source.

Singer's account of speciesism develops the term in order to diagnose what he regards as a pervasive and morally indefensible structure within modern moral practice. In Singer's analysis, speciesism consists in privileging the interests of members of one's own species simply because they belong to that species, rather than because their interests carry greater moral weight. The extension of equality across species, however, does not imply identical treatment between humans and animals but instead requires equal consideration of interests.² Singer argues that species preference is structurally analogous to racism and sexism: in each case, morally irrelevant characteristics are permitted to determine whose suffering counts. The significance of the analogy lies in exposing a common justificatory structure in which group membership is

¹ The term "speciesism" was first introduced by Ryder in a privately circulated pamphlet in 1970 and subsequently developed in his writings on animal experimentation. Although coined by Ryder, it was popularised by Singer in the first edition of *Animal Liberation* (1975), where Singer himself acknowledges that he owes the term to Ryder. See Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation*, rev. edn. (New York: Ecco, 2002), p. 269.

² In introducing the argument of *Animal Liberation*, Singer insists that '[t]he basic principle of equality does not require equal or identical treatment; it requires equal consideration', since '[e]qual consideration for different beings may lead to different treatment and different rights'. See *Ibid.*, p. 2.

treated as a sufficient ground for differential moral consideration.³

Central to Singer's argument is the principle of equal consideration of interests. This principle does not require identical treatment across species, but it does require that comparable interests receive comparable weight wherever they occur.⁴ What matters morally is the nature and intensity of the interests involved—not the identity of the being whose interests are at stake. Singer argues that once this principle is applied, many ordinary practices involving animals become difficult to justify, since they depend upon discounting animal suffering simply because it is animal suffering rather than human suffering. For Singer, the principle of equal consideration thus functions as a critical test of the coherence of modern moral commitments to equality.⁵

Within this framework, it is the capacity for suffering that establishes the boundary of moral concern.⁶ Singer follows the utilitarian tradition associated with Jeremy Bentham in treating sentience as the decisive condition for possessing morally relevant interests, expressed in Bentham's well-known formulation: 'the question is not, Can they reason? nor, Can they talk? but, Can they suffer?'.⁷ A being capable of suffering can be harmed in a morally significant sense, and its suffering must therefore enter into ethical deliberation. Characteristics such as rationality, linguistic capacity, or species membership cannot serve as adequate criteria for moral exclusion, as their use would justify distinctions structurally analogous to forms of discrimination already rejected within human moral reasoning—such as those based on race, sex, or cognitive capacity. Sentience thus marks the boundary at which a being's interests first enter the sphere of moral consideration, even if those interests differ in kind from the interests characteristic of persons.

Singer applies this framework directly to institutional practices such as intensive farming and animal experimentation.⁸ Modern forms of industrial agriculture, in particular, are taken to exemplify the systematic subordination

³ Singer formulates the analogy in explicitly structural terms: 'Racists violate the principle of equality by giving greater weight to the interests of members of their own race'; '[s]exist[s] violate the principle of equality by favouring the interests of their own sex'; and 'speciesists allow the interests of their own species to override the greater interests of members of other species'. 'The pattern', he concludes, 'is identical in each case'. See *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁴ In *Practical Ethics*, Singer defines the principle of equal consideration of interests, explaining that 'we give equal weight in our moral deliberations to the like interests of all those affected by our actions'. He adds that 'what the principle really amounts to is: an interest is an interest, whoever's interest it may be' (p. 20). He also stresses that equal consideration is 'a minimal principle of equality in the sense that it does not dictate equal treatment' (p. 22). See Peter Singer, *Practical Ethics*, 3rd edn. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 20–22.

⁵ Singer, *Animal Liberation*, p. 2.

⁶ Interpreting Bentham's argument, Singer maintains that '[t]he capacity for suffering and enjoyment is a prerequisite for having interests at all', and therefore that 'the limit of sentience . . . is the only defensible boundary of concern for the interests of others'. See Singer, *Practical Ethics*, p. 50.

⁷ Jeremy Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, ed. by J.H. Burns and H.L.A. Hart (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 283.

⁸ Singer states that he concentrates on 'the use of animals as food and in research' because these are 'examples of large-scale, systematic speciesism'. See Singer, *Practical Ethics*, p. 58.

of serious animal suffering to comparatively minor human benefits such as dietary preference and economic efficiency.⁹ Parallel concerns arise in the context of laboratory use, where animals are frequently exposed to significant harm for purposes whose necessity is often contested. These practices express a wider pattern in which human convenience routinely outweighs comparable animal interests.¹⁰

Singer's analysis therefore culminates in the claim that contemporary societies continue to privilege human interests in ways that cannot be justified by appeal to morally relevant differences between species. The persistence of such practices suggests that species membership continues to function as an implicit criterion of moral priority, even within ethical cultures that otherwise affirm the equal consideration of suffering as a fundamental moral principle.

Having outlined Singer's account of speciesism, it is necessary to recognise the extent to which his diagnosis identifies real inconsistencies within contemporary moral practice—even if these inconsistencies do not, on their own, demonstrate the moral irrelevance of species membership.

Modern dietary practice provides perhaps the clearest example of this tension, since contemporary societies routinely accept the large-scale infliction of animal suffering for benefits comparatively minor in moral weight—such as taste, convenience, and cost. Singer argues that, within industrialised societies, the use of animals for food typically subordinates serious animal interests to comparatively trivial human preferences.¹¹ Gaverick Matheny furthers this point by arguing that the ordinary pleasures attached to meat consumption are morally negligible when set against the suffering imposed upon factory-farmed animals, thereby exposing a serious disparity between professed concern for suffering and the actual weighting of animal interests in practice.¹² Singer is therefore justified in identifying a genuine inconsistency within contemporary food ethics, although its existence does not yet establish that speciesism alone explains it.

⁹ Singer argues that in industrialised societies 'a relatively minor human interest must be balanced against the lives and welfare of the animals involved', and insists that 'equal consideration of interests does not allow major interests to be sacrificed for minor interests' (p. 54). Similarly, Gaverick Matheny observes that 'our trivial interest in the taste of meat now trumps the pain endured by 17 *billion* farmed animals', revealing how far modern societies remain from considering animal interests equally (p. 21). See *Ibid.*, p. 54; Gaverick Matheny, 'Utilitarianism and Animals', in *In Defense of Animals: The Second Wave*, ed. by Peter Singer (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), pp. 13–25 (p. 21).

¹⁰ Singer contends that 'the overwhelming majority' of human beings 'take an active part in, acquiesce in, and allow their taxes to pay for practices that require the sacrifice of the most important interests of members of other species in order to promote the most trivial interests of our own species' (p. 9). He describes many animal experiments as cases in which 'the benefits to humans are either non-existent or very uncertain; while the losses to members of other species are certain and real' (p. 57). See Singer, *Animal Liberation*, p. 9; Singer, *Practical Ethics*, p. 57.

¹¹ Singer, *Practical Ethics*, p. 54.

¹² Matheny, 'Utilitarianism and Animals', p. 21.

A similar inconsistency appears in the contrast commonly drawn between companion animals and livestock. Contemporary societies typically regard dogs and cats as deserving strong legal protection against cruelty, while permitting the routine confinement and slaughter of pigs, cows, and chickens under conditions that would be considered unacceptable if applied to pets. As Matheny notes, this contrast reveals a striking disparity within existing legal and moral frameworks, since practices that would be criminal if directed towards companion animals are widely institutionalised when applied to animals used for food or research.¹³ The contrast between pets and livestock therefore reinforces Singer's claim that contemporary moral practice often assigns unequal weight to comparable interests in avoiding suffering.

Another comparable asymmetry emerges in the context of biomedical experimentation, which Singer identifies as one of the clearest locations in which speciesist reasoning can be observed.¹⁴ Experiments on animals are often justified on the grounds that they yield knowledge applicable to human beings, yet this justification presupposes that animals resemble humans in morally relevant respects—such as their capacity to experience stress, suffering, and fear.¹⁵ This asymmetry becomes especially striking where anticipated benefits to humans remain uncertain while harms to animals are immediate and definite, indicating what Singer describes as a failure to accord equal weight to like interests across species boundaries.¹⁶ Singer further reinforces this diagnosis by examining concrete instances of military and laboratory experimentation in which animals were subjected to repeated electric shocks, radiation exposure, and chemical agents for purposes whose

¹³ Matheny observes that anti-cruelty protections widely applied to companion animals would render standard practices in factory farming illegal if applied to livestock, exposing a striking contradiction within prevailing moral and legal attitudes towards different classes of animals. He remarks that 'if these anti-cruelty laws applied to animals in factory farms or laboratories, the ways in which these animals are treated would be illegal throughout North America and Europe', and accordingly asks whether dogs and cats are really 'so different from apes, pigs, cows, chickens, and rabbits' that one group should receive legal protection while the other has its mistreatment institutionalised. See Matheny, 'Utilitarianism and Animals', p. 24.

¹⁴ Singer, *Practical Ethics*, p. 56.

¹⁵ Singer posits that where experimenters justify such practices by claiming that they produce discoveries about humans, they must also concede that 'human and nonhuman animals are similar in crucial respects'. To exemplify this, he asserts: 'For instance, if forcing a rat to choose between starving to death and crossing an electrified grid to obtain food tells us anything about the reactions of humans to stress, we must assume that the rat feels stress in this kind of situation'. See *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Singer argues that the moral asymmetry underlying much animal experimentation becomes visible when one asks whether experimenters would be prepared to perform comparable procedures on 'orphaned humans with severe and irreversible brain damage' (pp. 57–58) if this were the only way to achieve similar scientific gains. Since animals such as 'apes, monkeys, dogs, cats and even mice and rats are more intelligent, more aware of what is happening to them, more sensitive to pain' than many such humans, he concludes that the continued use of animals in these contexts reveals a bias 'in favour of their own species' rather than a distinction grounded in morally relevant characteristics (p. 58). See *Ibid.*, pp. 57–58; and *Animal Liberation*, pp. 81–83, where Singer claims, 'adult apes, monkeys, dogs, cats, rats, and other animals are more aware of what is happening to them, more self-directing, and, so far as we can tell, at least as sensitive to pain as a human infant' (p. 82).

practical necessity was often unclear, thereby illustrating the extent to which such practices rest upon assumptions about the lesser moral significance of non-human animal suffering.¹⁷

A further tension appears within contemporary conservation ethics, where programmes intended to protect biodiversity frequently involve harming or killing individual animals in order to preserve species or ecosystems. As Arian D. Wallach and colleagues argue,¹⁸ critics of what they term 'compassionate conservation' typically justify such practices on the grounds that conservation's primary obligation is to protect native species and ecological collectives rather than individual sentient beings. This justification presupposes that the interests of individual animals may legitimately be subordinated to broader ecological goals, even where those animals possess morally relevant capacities for suffering and agency. Wallach therefore maintains that resistance to extending moral consideration to individual animals within conservation practice often reflects an underlying commitment to forms of human exceptionalism that limit which beings are recognised as members of the moral community.¹⁹ The resulting tension again illustrates the difficulty of reconciling widely affirmed concern for animal suffering with institutional practices that continue to permit its infliction under certain conditions.

Taken together, these examples indicate that Singer successfully identifies a genuine structural inconsistency within contemporary moral attitudes towards animals.

Although Singer correctly identifies genuine tensions within contemporary moral attitudes towards animals, interpreting those tensions as evidence of species prejudice is not philosophically inevitable, since analytic animal ethics offers alternative explanations of moral differentiation between humans and animals without reducing it to arbitrary species preference.

Singer's diagnosis of inconsistency across species boundaries depends upon treating sentience as the decisive threshold of moral status and assuming that comparable interests can be weighed within a single utilitarian calculation. However, this framework is not philosophically unavoidable—even within the analytic tradition in which Singer himself works. Jeff McMahan argues that the badness of death varies according to both the quantity of future goods lost and the degree of psychological continuity linking a subject to future experiences, thereby introducing a graded account of the harm of death that complicates

¹⁷ Singer documents military experiments in which monkeys were subjected to repeated electric shocks and exposed to radiation and chemical agents in order to assess their ability to operate flight-simulation equipment, illustrating the extent to which animals were treated as expendable instruments within military research programmes. See Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation*, pp. 25–29.

¹⁸ Arian D. Wallach, et al., 'Recognizing Animal Personhood in Compassionate Conservation', *Conservation Biology*, 34.5 (2020), 1097–1106 [DOI.ORG/10.1111/COBI.13494](https://doi.org/10.1111/COBI.13494).

¹⁹ Wallach and colleagues argue that objections to compassionate conservation frequently rest upon 'human exceptionalism, the view that humans are of a categorically separate and higher moral status than all other species', and contrast this with the claim that 'conservation should expand its moral community by recognising all sentient beings as persons'. See *Ibid.*, p. 1097.

any attempt to treat sentience alone as the decisive threshold of moral status.²⁰ David DeGrazia maintains that personhood is best understood as a cluster concept with indeterminate boundaries rather than a threshold reducible to sentience, supporting differentiated moral standing without appeal to species prejudice.²¹ As Shelly Kagan observes, Singer's conclusions rely upon the assumption that the interests of non-personal animals (merely sentient beings lacking personhood) can be weighed within a utilitarian calculation—that is, that comparable human and animal interests can be placed on the same scale and traded off against one another.²² Without this assumption, differences in moral status do not automatically count as prejudice, since Singer can derive his explanation of speciesism only if human and animal interests can be measured on the same moral scale.

Singer's critique presupposes that killing animals for food reflects a failure to give proper weight to their interests. Yet his own utilitarian framework permits what Kagan²³ and Tatjana Višak²⁴ identify as 'the replaceability argument'. Within Singer's own reasoning, if an animal can be killed painlessly and replaced by another equally happy animal, the total balance of pleasure is not reduced and the killing need not be morally wrong. The permissibility of such killing follows from Singer's assumption that the

²⁰ McMahan argues that 'the extent to which death is a misfortune for an individual is a function primarily of two independent factors: (1) the amount of good life of which the individual is deprived by death and (2) the extent to which the individual at the time of death would have been psychologically connected to himself at those times in the future when the good things in his life would have occurred'. See Jeff McMahan, 'The Comparative Badness for Animals of Suffering and Death', in *The Ethics of Killing Animals*, ed. by Tatjana Višak, Robert Garner, and Peter Singer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 65–85 (p. 70).

²¹ DeGrazia argues that 'personhood is associated with a cluster of properties without being precisely definable in terms of any specific subset', that 'we cannot draw a precise, non-arbitrary line that specifies what counts as enough [of these properties]', and therefore that 'personhood has blurred boundaries'. See David DeGrazia, 'On the Question of Personhood beyond Homo sapiens', in *In Defense of Animals: The Second Wave*, ed. by Peter Singer (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), pp. 40–53 (p. 42).

²² Kagan makes this assumption explicit through his discussion of the replacement argument, according to which killing a merely sentient animal may be morally permissible if the lost future pleasure is offset by bringing another equally happy animal into existence, thereby leaving no net loss of value. As she observes, it is 'precisely because Singer does assume this—because he thinks that mere animals are appropriately subject to a utilitarian calculus of this sort—that the permissibility of killing with replacement seems to be in play' (pp. 140–141). She adds that 'those prepared to accord deontological rights to mere animals will not be moved by the possibility of replacement' (p. 141), showing that Singer's conclusions depend on first accepting that animal interests can be weighed and traded off in this way, rather than beginning from a neutral premise. See Shelly Kagan, 'Singer on Killing Animals', in *The Ethics of Killing Animals*, ed. by Tatjana Višak, Robert Garner, and Peter Singer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 136–153 (pp. 140–141).

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 136–153.

²⁴ Višak characterises Singer's position as permitting the replaceability argument, according to which killing a merely sentient animal need not be wrong provided that 'the loss of the animal's future positive experiences is compensated by the creation of another equally happy animal'. See Tatjana Višak, 'Replaceability, Equality, and Animal Ethics', in *The Ethics of Killing Animals*, ed. by Tatjana Višak, Robert Garner, and Peter Singer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 71–92 (p. 73).

interests of non-personal animals may be assessed within a single utilitarian calculation.²⁵ A hierarchy of moral status reappears within Singer's framework: persons remain irreplaceable; merely sentient animals do not—thus hierarchy cannot by itself be taken as evidence of speciesism.

Singer's account of speciesism depends on a narrower picture of moral life than that presupposed by several of his critics. As Cora Diamond argues, Singer's approach makes it difficult to see what is significant in our relations with humans and animals because it grounds moral concern primarily in shared capacities such as suffering rather than in the forms of recognition that shape moral life.²⁶ Our understanding of animals as fellow creatures, companions, or beings with whom we share a common life does not arise simply from identifying their biological capacities; it derives from wider patterns of moral recognition embedded in human practices.²⁷ Singer's framework risks misdescribing the moral phenomena it seeks to explain by treating suffering as the single decisive measure of moral status. The tensions he identifies point beyond utilitarian calculation towards the need for a deeper account of moral status than suffering alone can provide.

Singer's account of speciesism assumes that moral status must be determined by reference to a single shared property—most fundamentally the capacity for suffering—so that differences in moral standing appear justified only where differences in suffering can be shown. Yet this assumption already presupposes a particular moral ontology in which value is located primarily in experiences rather than in modes of existence. A different framework emerges within the classical metaphysical tradition articulated most systematically by Thomas Aquinas, according to which goodness is convertible with being: goodness does not arise from the possession of a single morally relevant capacity but from participation in reality itself.²⁸ On this account, beings differ in moral standing not because some suffer more than others, but because they participate differently in actuality and perfection.²⁹

Within this framework, moral differentiation between forms of life corresponds to a graded structure of participation in being rather than to

²⁵ Kagan explains that, within Singer's framework, 'killing a mere animal is not wrong in cases involving this sort of replacement'. See Kagan, 'Singer on Killing Animals', p. 140.

²⁶ Diamond argues that although analogies exist between Singer's comparison of species prejudice with racial prejudice, 'the analogies are not simple and straightforward', and that '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'. See Cora Diamond, 'Eating Meat and Eating People', *Philosophy*, 53.206 (1978), 465–479 (p. 467).

²⁷ Diamond maintains that animals are not understood simply by identifying their biological capacities, but through the wider patterns of recognition that shape the ways in which we think about them and respond to them. See *Ibid.*, p. 476.

²⁸ Aquinas writes that 'goodness and being are really the same, and differ only in idea'—that 'everything is perfect so far as it exists'. See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. by Fathers of the English Dominican Province, vol. 1 (New York: Benziger Brothers, Inc., 1947), I, q. 5, art. 1, resp., p. 23.

²⁹ Aquinas further maintains that 'every being, as being, is good', since actuality itself implies perfection and desirability. See *Ibid.*, I, q. 5, art. 3, resp., p. 25.

arbitrary preference for members of one species over another. Aquinas explicitly argues that the multiplicity and inequality of creatures arise from the intention of divine wisdom itself.³⁰ Living beings possess a greater degree of actuality than non-living things; sentient creatures possess capacities for perception and desire that exceed those of merely vegetative life; and rational creatures participate in reality in a distinctive way through intellect and freedom. These differences are not morally irrelevant characteristics comparable to race or sex, but metaphysical distinctions concerning the manner in which beings exist and flourish. Hierarchy, within this account, expresses an ordered structure within reality rather than a projection of prejudice onto it.

Seen in this light, the tensions identified by Singer express an underlying recognition within moral reflection that different forms of life stand in relation to different kinds of goods proper to their nature, rather than any unjustified privileging of one species over another. Thus the moral significance of suffering cannot be understood in isolation from the wider ontological context within which living beings participate in goodness according to their nature. As Fran O'Rourke observes in his analysis of Aquinas's Dionysian metaphysics, the perfections of life and intellect do not stand alongside being as discrete attributes but unfold from it as increasingly elevated modes of participation in actuality, so that higher forms of life signify deeper participation in the structure of reality itself.³¹ A being's capacity for suffering is therefore morally significant because it reflects a particular mode of participation in actuality, but it cannot by itself determine moral status, since it does not capture the fuller differences in how living beings participate in reality and goodness.³²

Within the classical metaphysical tradition, the distinctive status of the human person emerges from the structure of created reality itself. Aquinas understands living beings as ordered according to progressively richer forms of actuality: vegetative life possesses the capacity for growth and nourishment,

³⁰ Aquinas argues that created diversity reflects the communication of divine goodness across multiple grades of being: 'the perfection of the universe . . . consists of the diversity of things' (art. 1, p. 246), and therefore 'the same wisdom is the cause of their inequality' (art. 2, pp. 246–247). See *Ibid.*, I, q. 47, art. 1–2, resp., pp. 246–247.

³¹ Drawing upon Dionysius and Aquinas, O'Rourke explains that life and intellect are not additional perfections alongside existence but arise from it as more intensive modes of participation in actuality: 'The perfections [of life and intellect] are not separate but spring from Being itself . . . its extension is more universal, thus its perfection is more fundamental and creative'. He further notes, citing Aquinas's commentary on Dionysius, that intellectual beings 'possess being more excellently' and therefore participate more abundantly in goodness. See Fran O'Rourke, *Pseudo-Dionysius and the Metaphysics of Aquinas* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010), p. 136.

³² Through Aquinas, O'Rourke emphasises that the multiplicity of perfections present within beings corresponds to their degree of participation in esse: 'Aquinas ingeniously attributes the multiplicity of perfections within a being to the unique excellence of its own act of esse'. He further observes that '[t]he excellence of being enjoyed by any reality is relative to its possession in act of a greater measure of goodness', so that what ultimately determines perfection is the actuality of perfection itself as grounded in participation in the act of esse. See *Ibid.*, p. 137.

sensitive life adds perception and desire, and rational life introduces intellect and freedom as the highest operations proper to a creaturely nature.³³ These differences do not represent arbitrary classifications imposed upon nature; they reflect an ordered differentiation grounded in the forms through which beings participate in existence itself.³⁴

The human person thus occupies a distinctive place within the hierarchy of creation because rational life includes within itself the perfections found at lower levels while surpassing them through intellectual activity. Aquinas therefore maintains that the intellectual soul contains within itself the powers associated with vegetative and sensitive life, so that the unity of the human person reflects a higher mode of participation in actuality.³⁵ The distinctiveness of human moral status thus follows from the form of life proper to rational creatures and not merely a single experiential property considered in isolation—namely, the capacity to suffer.

Robert Grosseteste develops this insight further through his description of the human being as *minor mundus*—the creature in whom the structure of creation is reflected as a microcosm. Humanity gathers together within itself the levels of created reality—from material existence to intellectual life—and thereby mirrors the ordered totality of the universe as a unified whole.³⁶ Within this framework, dominion over other creatures is not arbitrary domination but the intelligible ordering of creation according to degrees of participation in perfection.³⁷ Contemporary moral practice continues to presuppose this graded understanding of living beings, even where its metaphysical foundations are no longer explicitly articulated. Singer's interpretation of hierarchy as prejudice fails to account for the deeper structure informing inherited moral intuitions about human and animal life.

Singer's account of speciesism therefore succeeds in identifying genuine tensions within contemporary moral attitudes towards animals, particularly

³³ Aquinas explains that the distinction between forms of life reflects degrees of perfection within nature itself, 'as the mixed things are more perfect than the elements, plants than minerals, and animals than plants, and men than other animals; and in each of these one species is more perfect than others'. See *Summa Theologica*, I, q. 47, a. 2, resp., p. 247.

³⁴ Aquinas argues that diversity and inequality among creatures arise from divine wisdom itself: 'the distinction and multitude of things come from the intention of the first agent . . . because His goodness could not be adequately represented by one creature alone'. See *Ibid.*, I, q. 47, a. 1, resp., p. 246.

³⁵ Aquinas maintains that 'the intellectual soul contains virtually whatever belongs to the sensitive soul of brute animals, and to the nutritive soul of plants', and thus 'by one and the same soul he is both animal and man'. See *Ibid.*, q. 76, a. 3, resp., p. 376.

³⁶ Grosseteste describes humanity as the creature in whom the structure of creation is reflected in miniature, since it mirrors the integrality of creation: 'all shine forth in man as their effect . . . which is why he is called a tiny world'. See Robert Grosseteste, *De Confessione*, pp. 240–41, quoted in James McEvoy, *The Philosophy of Robert Grosseteste* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 408.

³⁷ Grosseteste interprets human dominion as grounded in humanity's unique place within the order of creation: 'being equal to all together yet equalled by none, they commonly owe him natural obedience; so he is the image of God'. See *Ibid.*

where serious animal suffering is subordinated to comparatively minor human benefits. Yet his explanation remains incomplete because it presupposes that suffering alone determines moral standing. The classical metaphysical tradition instead understands moral differentiation between forms of life as reflecting differences in the goods appropriate to distinct modes of existence and participation in actuality. Contemporary societies continue to recognise this structure implicitly, even where its metaphysical foundations are no longer explicitly articulated. Singer's critique therefore exposes real inconsistencies within modern practice but misidentifies their source by interpreting hierarchy as prejudice rather than as an expression of the graded structure of being itself.

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