

The Principle of Equality and Humanity's treatment of animals

The way in which humanity treats animals has been a contentious topic since the late 18th century, with Philosophers like Jeremy Bentham asking why the law refuses its protection to any sensitive being i.e., any animal that can suffer like humans do (Bentham, 1789, p. 144). Suffering is universally disliked, as humans are biologically predisposed to notice the signs of suffering in others, this applying to humans as well as animals. Humans have also experienced the physical and mental anguish of suffering before (even if they were too young to remember it) and so feel compelled to intervene and end it, lest they let someone else suffer as they did. If it is shown that animals can suffer as we do, with the same psychological and physical scars, then the way we as a species treat them should be amended to make their suffering as minimal as possible. This is where Peter Singer's moral principle of the equal consideration of interests comes into the argument. He states that we should give equal weight to the moral deliberations of all parties concerned so that one side does not stand to lose more than the other gains (Singer, 1993, p. 21). Singer expounds on this further by using the example of pain, that because pain is undesirable to all, not just humans or animals, that equal consideration should be given to the relief of both pains (ibid). For example, if one's pain is more excruciating than another following a natural disaster, the one in the most pain should be administered the most treatment and pain relief. This is not equal treatment but is still giving each person equal considerations, considering one person's pain is greater than the other, they are the priority to relieve of that pain, as the other person's pain is easier to deal with without treatment (Singer, 1993, p. 24) (See Image 1).

Extrapolating this principle to the complex relationship between farm animals/animals being experimented on and humans would produce a scenario where humans still eat animals for sustenance and test vaccines on animals but cause less suffering whilst doing so, exploring other non-meat options for food, and letting the individual decide whether they want to eat meat or not. With better quality animal substitutes and more options for vegans and vegetarians, hopefully the number of animals being farmed can be reduced with the smaller demand for meat products that comes with a more conscientious and educated population (See Image 2).

Bibliography

Bentham, J. (1789) *The Principles of Morals and Legislation*. 1st edn. London: Oxford University Press.

Singer, P. (1993) *Practical Ethics*. 2nd edn. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Image Appendix

Image 1 - The most disadvantaged among us need the most help, the Principle of Equal Consideration. Image sourced from <https://www.photosforclass.com/search/equity> Accessed 7th November 2022.



Image 2 – More animals will be free to roam the wilderness if meat consumption is reduced overall. Image sourced from <https://stock.weanimalsmedia.org/search/?searchQuery=free+animals&assetType=default> Accessed 7th November 2022.

