

The Attitude towards Living Being in Contemporary Western Philosophy

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When considering Western philosophy as different eras, which commenced with Thales, contemporary philosophy is identified as the philosophy which appeared at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. This is known as something that is referred to as a meaningful relationship, awakening between philosophical problems and languages. However, when taking into consideration the “living being” concept it is apparent that relative to other philosophies, more validity has been provided through contemporary philosophy. It is clear that, the subject of many philosophers in this era have been building up thoughts regarding discussions concerning animal ethics through practical philosophy and welfare procedures as well as prevention of cruelty to animals.

Ideas submitted in connection with man and animals through philosophy received from theistic influence, ideas which were presented through the Darwinian Evolution about the origin of life during the renaissance era and the cruelty to animals within the modern capitalistic framework can be pointed out as the factors that had an impact on the building of philosophical systems such as these. Therefore, the subject of philosophy which was focused on the human has moved slightly beyond and is now involved in inquiring into animal species. This is considered a very important characteristic. The reason being, that up until now, only a philosophical investigation into man and his needs have been carried out through the subject of philosophy and not engaging in philosophical studies to other animals outside of this. But, this tendency which arose within contemporary philosophy can be considered as a great contribution towards animal welfare and in strengthening the relationship between humans and animals.

It is also important to inquire into what meanings have been generated through the vision which has been directed ethically towards animals.

Peter Singer is a philosopher who created a controversial ideology regarding the welfare of animals and animal freedom. The focal opinion that he pointed out through his book *Animal Liberation* is that, "All animal are equal"¹. It was Singer who presented the leading utilitarian theory on animal welfare.

There are three key elements in his theory as follows;

“First, sentiency (generally defined as the ability to feel pain and suffering) is the only defensible boundary of moral concern between species.

Second, once it can be reasonably supposed that a being is sentient, its suffering should be taken into account morally.

Third, sentient beings, human or animal have an equal claim to have their interests considered as individuals.”²

He argues that, the conscious life of beings should come before everything else.

His vision on animals is not a vision that is theistic. He has presented his vision going against Christian ideology that man can create any impact against animals and criticizing it. Peter Singer has accepted the fact that individual conscientiousness is the greatest difference between human animals and non-human animals.

This is something that he has presented as the animal welfare theory's utilitarianism statement. That is, “if it could be shown that the suffering of some animals can save the suffering of many other creatures, it would be justifiable to make them suffer³”. “Singer argues that utilitarian theory requires that the interests of all sentient beings be given equal consideration⁴”. Also, it is specified through the utilitarianism theory that, it is not only persons who are humans against being subjected to human pressure but that action should be taken against dangerous type of assaults and suffering that is bestowed upon animals.

While criticizing the unequal way that humans treat animals and their cruelty towards them, Singer points out that, all animals are equal and therefore, one animal should not be cruel to another animal. That is, every animal has the ability to feel pain. This does not apply to man or some animal only but applies to all conscientious living beings. It is evident from his various postures that, if we commit some act that causes pain in an animal, he suffers because of that. The conclusion that we should draw from this proof and the understanding of this is that, such a thing should be made relevant where we are concerned as well and think about it, and point out that we should avoid further such acts.

It is also pointed out that animals too have a nerve system similar to that of man and that we should accept the fact that they too have feelings and perceptions because of that. He points out further that, the action of the nerves are not artificial and that its origin and

evolution within us as well as in animals is equal and that there is a nervous system of high standard included in mammals as well as birds.

Therefore, it has been emphasized that there should be a change in the way we treat animals. There are several aspects that need to be changed. That is consuming animals as food, using them as agricultural implements, using them in various fields of science for research purposes, hunting of animals, using animal products, using animals for advertising purposes, having animal sports, creating zoos, selling of animals etc. It is his view that by boycotting such activities, a vast number of incidents of suffering among animals can be prevented.

Accordingly, he emphasizes the fact that, if people become herbivorous, it will be of benefit towards animals. The reason being what we can see within the world of business is animal cultivation. Due to this, animals have become a mere source of food. However, as Singer points out, meat or flesh is not an essential where consumption is concerned. Singer strongly criticizes scientific changes that are brought about in an animal's body and slaughtering them for food. He argues that, the pain that an animal has to suffer cannot be justified, in this instance. In addition to making use of animals for food, the other major instance is when animals are used for scientific experiments and research. While criticizing the use of animals for research purposes, Singer points out that, experiments carried out using animals, do not always portray a medical scientific requirement. He emphasizes the fact that, using animals in an unlimited manner and subjecting them to cruelty is not something that should be done and that they suffer pain similar to what we go through. He also questions why people are not subject to such experiments.

Pointing out that at the same time, using animals for advertisements and sports and achieving satisfaction through it as well as keeping animals imprisoned in zoos, generates a low grade of enjoyment within man whereas we should view animals with compassion.

Further, in order to explain his standpoint on killing of animals, Singer takes as an example the difference between man and animals. Accordingly, intelligent living beings have sentient idealism and they are able to grasp the future. However, conscientious living beings who are not individuals do not have this ability to comprehend the future. This is the only difference between these two groups. But it has been pointed out that, on this basis, the way people treat animals is against mankind. Also, Singer argues that, not every human being can be considered an individual person and that sometimes an animal can be considered a person.

Accordingly it is apparent that, Singer has attempted to consolidate the dual thought that was in existence in relation to man and animal under a principle of equality. It can also be debated that an important attempt has been made to divide, on a reasonable basis between man and animal, within the ethical philosophy field and outside of it, that, which was presented in respect of animal welfare and getting rid of cruelty to animals.

Investigating the rights of animals in an ethical way was Barbara James's intention.

Use of animals for food, research purposes, religious rites and other various requirements has been criticized in her book, 'Animal Rights.' This book shows that, all animals have the right to live as well as to be free of cruelty.

According to this book, it is pointed out that, sacrificing animals for religious purposes in traditional Jewish and Islamic religions brutal and inhumane. It is stated that, animals are not subjected to any method of pain prevention before slaughter and that the argument that if they are slaughtered using religious rites they will not suffer pain is false and that every living being has the sensory ability. It has been further pointed out that, therefore if methods such as electric shocks are used to slaughter animals like chickens, cows, goats and pigs that are reared for food, it is not possible to say that they will not feel any pain and that they are reared also in an inhumane way. In one way it is an infliction that their biological bodies are subjected to various transformations on behalf of man and a violation of their rights as well. In this way, she has not only criticized rearing of animals for food but catching fish as well. Accordingly she points out that, fish that are caught are not killed immediately but are packed into various containers and kept for a long time, which causes a lot of suffering for the fish. Also certain fish are subjected to colouring procedures too. Certain fishermen fear that the quantity of small fish might reduce and kill other species of animals which consume small fish. The question as to how moral these acts are, crops up then.

Similarly, how immoral is the use of fish which have been treated with various chemicals and colours and consumed by humans who are of the same type? Questioned Barbara James. The reason being, that chemical poisons are contained in these fish.

An argument that people who are against non-violence towards animals often bring up is that, in relative to man, animals do not have a brain and owing to this fact they do not feel or understand anything. But Barbara James confirms that this attitude is incorrect. Accordingly it is shown that animals such as whales have a brain and that is larger than a

human being's. They are an intelligent group of animals and have a language that is inherent to them and they can exchange ideas with other animals that are a long distance away from them.

Accordingly, Barbara James accepts through her vision that, the facts that animals too bear intelligent characteristics and that it is recognized that, animals have rights, the same as man.

Tom Regan is a philosopher who has presented theories on animal rights. He has emphasized upon a main triple principles in his book "Rights Theory".

"First, animals are ends in themselves and must not be regarded as means to human ends; as resources, commodities, laboratory tools or units of production.

Second, all animals which are in words of Tom Regan 'subjects of a life' have inherent value and therefore possess rights.

Third, those beings which possess it equally, so it is normally wrong to infringe the rights of individual animals no matter the consequences.⁵"

Regan has pointed out further that, animals have diversity and emotions, feelings and likes and dislikes and those they bring subjectivity to our world through these. He also shows us that, this subjectivity provides an inherited value to their living species.

At the same time it has been pointed out that, a mammal that has a year old or older general psyche has rights equal to those of humans.

Accordingly, it is apparent through Regan's vision that, animals have been accepted to be similar to humans and that it is a vision of importance that impacts securing animal rights as well as, creating an attitude of equality regarding man and animal. He says that animals possess a value that is hereditary. The ideology that animals have no value and that their value is manifest only in compliance with the needs of man has been rejected.

By showing that animals should bring about their own end, and that through that man has an unlimited right against animals which was an accepted norm, this ideology too has been rejected.

Accordingly, it is clear through this, that, man cannot make any kind of an impact towards animals and that all animals possess rights and values which are unique to them. Intelligence factors and the capability of talking or other criteria are not relevant here.

Andrew Linzey attributes a theistic foundation to the rights of animals. According to the Generosity Theory, the rights that animals have are theistic (Theo rights/God rights). This is what is presented as the reason for awarding such rights. That is, precise are awarded to various animals by God. Therefore, such rights are not awarded but more or less specified.

Accordingly it is stated in this, that, there is a value to each of God's creations and that definite living beings are given certain rights on the basis of God's morals. Also, those animals who breathe and who are full of life are considered subjects that provide values from heritage to God. He also points out that the society of people should mistreat animals as less as possible. It can be said that, his theistic basis can be demonstrated quite well through this. The reason being, that animal rights are based on a theistic vision and even though their welfare is argued about, he does not say that people should not mistreat animals in any way. That is, it is established that, by harassing the lives of animals in a minimal way, you can make an impact on them.

However, he strongly condemns the use of animals in fields such as agriculture, science and sports as well as the abuse that is carried out unthinkingly. Accordingly, he emphasizes the fact that, people have a duty to not only respect animal rights but to be ethically benevolent towards them. He has used four major principles in this argument. They are as follows;

“First, humans are the deputized moral agents of God in creation, with a God-given responsibility to care for the earth generally and animals in particular.

Second, this human power or ‘dominion’ over animals should take as its model the Christ given paradigm of lordship manifest in service.

Third, the logic of this Christological paradigm is that the ‘higher’ should sacrifice itself for the ‘lower’ and not the reverse.

Fourth, the animals have an analogous status to that of children; adult humans have a special responsibility to both, and finally animals, like children⁶”

According to what is stated in the fourth principle, animals have similar rights to children and that adult people have a special responsibility to both these groups. Finally, animals and children are equal. Both groups do not have full rights. The reason for this is the lack of power they possess.

What is emphasized through Andrew Linzey's Generosity Theory is that, humans should act with individual benevolence in order to safeguard the wholesome existence of other living beings. As a result, Linzey points out that man should be a category of servant. But when considering the practicality of this, what has happened is the reverse. That is that, other groups of living beings have become man's servants.

Arthur Broome's, Humanitarian Theory says that animals should be shown compassion.

This theory serves to minimize the violence against animals and to create an attitude that they are similar to our friends.

There are two key elements;

“First, that human should prevent unnecessary cruelty and promote kindness to sentient beings.

Second, that human should exercise benevolence or philanthropy towards inferior creatures not least of all for their own (human's) sake.⁷”

He has rejected the Christian belief of cruelty against animals or human beings. Accordingly this theory can be identified as a sensitive vision regarding all animals.

Christina Hoff Summers attention is drawn towards, the morality and immorality of investigating the use of animals for various purposes. She has concentrated on investigating the question, is there a moral justification for using animals for experiments and research purposes? As Christina points out, animals have a right to moral treatment. Christina also agrees on the fact that, the pain humans and animals suffer is equal. Further, although she accepts there is a difference between killing a man and slaughtering an animal, she emphasizes the fact that, being cruel to animals and killing them for purposes of experimenting by humans should not be done. She shows us that, animals are not essential for most scientific experiments, and that certain studies conducted with animals are not relevant to medical science and that the use of animals without such a responsibility does not contain any moral characteristics. Peter Singer too has presented a similar view in relation to this.

Further, she believes that, the reason that is relevant to the idea that the lives of animals are generally inferior to the lives of human beings are promoted due to a common policy that we have created ourselves.

Also, killing an animal for fun or through hunting is appalling. But we define, killing of a man for the same purpose as a very wicked act. Accordingly, it is shown that there is a difference in the moral judgment between man and animal.

Such a difference is apparent between animal and man. That is, human life develops. Therefore there is a direction for it. But there is no such thing in the lives of animals. Human lives have more value than the lives of animals. Accordingly, it has also been pointed out that, through the right to live for human beings, the right to live for other animals has been suspended. Christina questions as to why, animals are used for various requirements of human beings and why people are not used for these needs.

Nietzsche, who was the pioneer in presenting ideas on existentialism within contemporary philosophy, submits a definition on his ideas on history and the relation between animals and human beings through evolutionism.

He identifies man and animal both as a similar group. According to his evolutionistic ideas, man is an ape who has emerged gradually through evolutionism. If not, an ape who has developed further. Therefore he points out that, a human being identified as a person he cannot be attributed with humanity. It has also been revealed that man is very similar to the ape than to any other animal and as a result, as an animal, man does not have particularize or splendor.

It is shown that if man is to receive the value of humanity somehow, he should change qualitatively. That is, man usually lives the life of a beast. They care only about fulfilling their basic requirements and as a result their lives become merely eternal. These lives that people live are not real, while it is far more similar to the lives of animals. If someone is to remove himself from this, and live as a real human being, Nietzsche points out that he should develop ethical values within himself. Nietzsche says that, it should be investigated whether, in the same manner, animals who became humans and animals who are not human beings have some objective for living. According to him, there is an objective. That is, there exists a possibility that a proper human being could be born even rarely owing to the existence of animals. "The end of man's posterity can be seen through such a human being (superior being) who seldom comes into being.⁸"

According to Nietzsche human beings are more similar to chimpanzees. There is only a minor difference between these two. That is a quantitative difference. There are no qualitative differences between the two. Although, man carries out tasks in a quantitatively

advanced method than that of a chimpanzee, chimpanzees do not possess such qualities such as honesty and ethical values. Accordingly, a person becomes different from a chimpanzee only if they possess ethical values within them.

Therefore it is Nietzsche's belief that, the opinion that great men are produced through the evolution procedure cannot be accepted. At the same time, it is pointed out that, people are not keen to achieve humanity due to the fear and lethargy within them. As a result they perpetually live as animals. Therefore it can be said that, Nietzsche has accepted the fact that one form of man is the animal form. Accordingly it can be stated that, a situation that there is no clear disparity between the way that others view differences between man and animals has become evident.

Previously, through the thinking that was presented regarding animals and man, a chief criterion that was said to be the difference between these two groups, was the concept known as intelligence. But Nietzsche does not use this criterion of intelligence to separate man from animal. He points out that just because man is intelligent; he is no different from an animal. According to him, the disparity between a great scientist and a chimpanzee is only a normative difference. Further, if you compare a child with low intelligence with a chimpanzee that has high intelligence, it can be said that the chimpanzee has a higher level of intelligence than the child. Therefore it is Nietzsche's opinion that, the criterion of intelligence used to label the difference between man and animal is no longer applicable.

Nietzsche also criticizes the theory of Darwin's Evolution. According to him, the opinion of Darwin that, man is actually an animal is incorrect. Nietzsche clearly emphasizes the fact that, "although man was initially an animal he can go beyond being an animal and achieve proper humanity⁹". Therefore, according to Darwin's statement, there is no logical relationship between man and animal. At the same time, it is pointed out that his major concept says that the craving for power is a characteristic present between man and animals as well.

Accordingly what is apparent is that, Nietzsche considers animals as a group that is equal to man.

Arthur Schopenhauer points out that, animals should be considered as a stratagem and by practicing compassion towards animals, examples and assistance can be obtained on how to be compassionate towards human beings.

Accordingly the animal is some kind of a thing. It is also accepted that morality is something that is assigned through the argument against animals and that it is a brutal thing. He accepts the fact that every living being has a requirement to be free of pain. However he has also pointed out that, the unlimited compassion towards every living being is a permanent and trustworthy responsibility of a weak moral control. At the same time, it is said that "He reared a dog named Soul¹⁰". Accordingly it can be declared that, an ideology on non-violence against animals is being circuitously manifested through his vision.

It has also been shown that, various parts of every animal living in the world has been created to assist an animal to protect itself and that each such part is an object of resoluteness. This resoluteness has pre-determined the animal's method of living etc, long before its birth itself.

Schopenhauer has defined that, this resoluteness is a common principle for all animals.

Jeremy Bentham has shown us that, when dealing with animals, they should be treated in an equal manner as man and that their capability to reasoning and their verbal aptitudes should not be used as criteria to belittle them.

In his opinion, when we carry out acts towards animals, all activities that appeal to all animals should be taken into one account and other animals that possess these likes should be treated in an equal manner.

Similarly, based on the questions, to whom does morality apply? To whom does it not apply? It is possible to see a difference between man and animal but it is not justified to treat animals unequally.

Although we can be satisfied that people have the ability to meaningfully discuss likes and dislikes, when we consider animals, it is apparent that there is no such satisfaction of that sort.

Therefore, it should not be questioned in relation to animals whether they possess the ability to argue or whether they have the capability to talk, but how one can be cruel towards animals. (The question is No can they reason? No can they talk? But can they suffer?)

Accordingly, contemporary western philosophy has moved towards a trend of practicality and been motivated to create ethical, discussions on the welfare of animals, non-violence against animals and animal rights.

It can also be pointed out that, the human focused vision which was prevalent in a certain way within philosophy up to then is being changed to a certain extent and taken to another extreme.

Endnotes

1. Grazia David De, Mappes Thomas A, *Bio Medical Ethics*, London, McGraw Hill Publishers, 1988, p.235
2. Clark Paul Barry, Linzey Andrew, *Dictionary of Ethics, Theology and Society*, Routledge Publishers, 1997, p.30
3. *ibid*, p .31
4. Judith A. Boss, *Perspective on Ethics*, London, Mayfield Publishers, 1998, p.295
5. *Dictionary of Ethics*, p.31
6. *ibid*
7. *ibid*, p.30
8. Dharmasiri Gunapala, *Schopenhauer and Nietzsche*, Colombo, S. Godage and Brothers, 1987, p.107
9. *ibid*, p.113
10. Russell Bertrand, *History of Western Philosophy (Sinhala Translation)*, Colombo, Educational Publications Department, 1970, p.832

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