

We all occasionally experience guilt when we encounter how animals are treated for our lifestyles - the cats used to test our cosmetics, the chickens caged to lay our eggs, or the tigers captured for our viewing pleasure in zoos. This fact is supported by the growing trend for 'free-range' meats, or public disgust at fur coats and vivisection.

Just as when people began to express disgust at slavery less than 200 years ago, it was a theory of 'human rights' that forced change, and with other living creatures it makes sense to forge a theory of 'animal rights' to do the same. After all, these creatures are not human, but they do live and experience their lives and so presumably there are some similarities - unlike rocks, or trees which have no conscious lives (we know this as they lack the physiology required to have such lives which humans and animals share).

The treatment of human slaves made it very obvious that something was wrong with our culture, and it was this disgust at the very worst treated of the slaves that forced the logical idea of human rights to be realised. The exact same is true of animals, they are vastly different from humans, but it is when we see them treated the worst that it becomes most obvious that something is wrong. The following few paragraphs were written to explain the theory of animal rights, and it's relevance to all our lives.

Animal Rights

Rights exist to protect conscious capacities, for example: *the right to live* protects our capacity to consciously exist and therefore protects us from being needlessly killed, *the right not to be forced into undue suffering* protects our capacity to feel pain and so protects us against violence, and *the right to vote* protects our interest in political matters which might affect us. They may not be perfect, and occasionally crimes may be committed which violate these rights - but they are our only protection against the greatest crime of all: abuse which is not recognised as abuse. After all, a world in which these simple rights were not recognised at all would be worse than one in which they were violated occasionally.

The problem with rights (and so with many of our laws and moral views) is that they currently only relate to humans, and yet they protect characteristics which may well appear in individuals other than humans. Perhaps this point could be illustrated a little better:

Let us imagine that somewhere, deep in outer space, there exists a planet, similar to Earth, on which an incredibly advanced alien race are living - the like of whose abilities dwarf our own. One day, something forces them to leave their home planet and they travel through space, using their ingenious technology, in search of a planet on which they can live. Imagine for a second that they discover Earth and decide to make it their new home.

This example at present is completely fictional as there exist no beings such as this, as far as we know. However if they did exist, provided that these 'aliens' have the relevant characteristics, they too should be given the rights which relate to them - common sense *moral extensions*. For example, if they have a conscious existence (ie, if they experience their lives, like us - rather than simply performing actions like a computer) they should have the right to live, and if they can then suffer they should have the right not to be forced into undue suffering. They are unlikely to wish to be our slaves and so should also be given the right to freedom. Similarly, if they do not communicate well, or partake in similar lives as us, it might not be useful to attribute them a right to vote, however we could, and indeed should, give their interests a say in our political decisions

(say not building shopping centres over their gardens). This example also shows, incidentally, that humans don't deserve rights just for 'being human' but for having the characteristics that require the individual rights.

If it is true that we should grant these 'superior beings' the same rights that we have, dependant on their having the relevant characteristics, then what bids them to allow us the same privilege? As the inferior species in the example, we cannot use our superiority as a marker. Instead it shows we can only appeal to us having the relevant characteristics to deserve the right. After all, it should not matter whether or not we are better than them, just as in our society we do not lawfully permit discrimination on intelligence or physical abilities - everyone has a right to live, and not to be tortured regardless of how physically disabled or mentally impaired they may be. Lets fast forward to the final part of the example though, a world in which the fictional alien race do not see the moral logic in this:

The alien race held no regard for the capacity of the human to suffer, they were made to cater for their every whim - the most appalling of which was the fulfilling of their tastes. Humans were allowed to live in houses with each other, built side by side, so as they could still fulfil their natural desires to communicate and socialise - however this was done in same sex communities for good reason: women were kept constantly pregnant through artificial insemination so they could provide milk for their alien masters who would come knocking every day to pat their heads and drain their breasts of the milk. The children? Well the females were sent to grow for the same purpose, they could not be allowed the milk of their mothers as this would reduce profitability. The males had little such luck - some were humanely shot and then eaten as nourishment (of course to waste such flesh is unthinkable), and some were grown and used as the source of the seed to keep impregnating the females (though the extraction of the 'seed' was done with cold metallic machines, of course, to increase productivity).

Upon completion of their individual life purposes, when the humans could no longer fulfil their roles, they would each be humanely euthanized - so as to keep maintenance of the houses to a minimum, and they were then sold as food to make the whole process just profitable enough to continue. The aliens did not need to consume the humans and human products to live, they had simply developed a taste for them - like most of the other, pre-existing creatures on earth the aliens could survive on non-animal products. The revelation that the whole system is needless in this way is what justifies the disgust it conjures in the mind...

After reading the example, most of us would be pleased this horrendous situation is not reality. It is not even the fact that people like you or I are being used as food sources that's the worst thing, it is that such a seedy industry could exist that leaves a sour taste - the very idea that giving us houses to live in, or small communities to speak to one another in, would make it okay is odd to say the least.

But what if we took away the intelligence of the humans? What if the example was changed, and that the humans were selectively bred so as they were now unable to rationalise their situations - ie, they still had the same desires, but were now grateful to their masters for the increases in welfare - is the system now morally 'okay'? Perhaps this situation is easier to state if we imagine those mentally handicapped humans in our own societies or families who are at this level, or perhaps even those younger children who are unable to rationalise things yet - would it be okay to abuse them in place of the mentally able individuals who were in the example before? Of course not, these humans still do not deserve to be used - and is it not discriminatory to allow the weak to be abused by the strong? Our society has been built on this idea of fairness and morality

for hundreds of years, and those behaviours that go against this (ie, slavery, sexual and racial inequality, class discrimination) have been, or are being phased out for everyone's benefit.

Through this little thought experiment, we have already come to the core of animal rights theory. We live in a society where it is legally permitted to use individuals who have the same intellect as many mentally disabled humans and young children, in alarmingly similar - often worse - ways than mentioned above. We justify our use of animals (in our farming, our science and our entertainment) by giving them the equivalent of what the aliens gave to us. The houses and communities which humans were given to live in a 'more natural' way echo the switch we have made towards free range cows and hens so as they too can live out more of their 'natural behaviours'. But at the end of it all, if it isn't right to treat those mentally incapable humans (those that have the same intellectual levels of cows or hens), in this way then it is hypocritical of us to say the opposite of animals. After all, the only difference between the two is species - a physical difference. It may seem ridiculous to call it just a 'physical difference', but that is all it is in this particular case - which is why it's best to use the example of a mentally disabled human rather than a fully able one, as it shows we should all have rights regardless of our intellectual levels. So now intelligence is out of the way, the only difference between the disabled humans and the able cow is purely physical - and anyone who has been mocked because of physical differences knows that this kind of discrimination isn't right. It's not right whether it be over a facial disfigurement, how many legs someone has, what colour their skin is, or whether that skin is covered with hair or feathers. And it certainly isn't right when that discrimination is being used to justify the use and abuse of entire lives. The above shows that we don't as decent people agree with physical or intellectual discrimination, and also that this is exactly what our use of animals is.

Presumably just as the aliens in the example would, we currently do justify our behaviour by saying that the animals we use are inferior to us - generally because they do not have the same intellectual capacities as us. But of course as the thought experiment shows, we don't honestly believe that individuals should suffer because they are mentally, or physically 'inferior'. As Brigid Brophy put it:

"To argue that we humans are capable of complex multifarious thought and feeling, whereas the sheep's perception is probably limited by lowly sheepish perceptions, is no more to the point than if I were to slaughter and eat you on the grounds that I am a sophisticated personality able to enjoy Mozart, formal logic and cannibalism, whereas your imaginative world seems confined to True Romances and tinned spaghetti."

At the moment, the reason we create welfare regulations for the animals we use, rather than respecting these now so clear rights ('freedom foods', or free range hens for example - animals that are still used and killed for us, but done so in a slightly nicer way), is because this is all we need do to take the disgusting reminder that we are not treating them fairly away. Just as a superior race might want to give us bigger cages, or time outside, or perhaps even the chance to socialise with each other, we have begun treating animals better as at current it is a terrible reminder that we should not be using them for our benefit at all. The example of the aliens, as well as our consciences when we see inside factory farms or slaughterhouses, often remind us that what we are doing is not right. The right answer is not *regulating* the disrespect of these creatures lives, but rather *reforming* our behaviours so we don't do it at all. After all, welfare regulation seeks only to take the nasty reminders out of the sight - taking away all the ugly parts of the abuse, leaving only that which is so 'tastefully' done that most people won't even realise there is anything

wrong. If such a method had been taken with slavery, and had the slaves been unable to voice their discontent like the animals can't, then it's be doubtful slavery would ever have become abolished in western society.

In a nutshell, this is exactly where animal rights stands. Often in misunderstanding this actually very simple issue, people take up extremely defensive reactions. Understandably so, after all we grow up with this idea of animals as products - they are in the food we eat, the clothes we wear and even sometimes in the testing of our medicines. However due to the unhealthy nature of animal products in our food (see details in the next section), the unreliability of animal tested drugs, and the availability of hundreds of alternatives to fur and leather - animal rights is now challenging moral thought at every level of government and society, and it requires only the continued change of consumer habits to properly rise. The huge recent increase in vegan products (from dairy free cheeses, to milk alternatives, and the many faux meats), non-animal tested methods of science and man-made synthetics are testament to that. The question is a matter of 'when' not 'if' animal rights are granted, as historically people eventually do what's right - we just have to see this case for animal rights for exactly what it is. It isn't a challenge to our own views and against our opinions, these of course are all learned out with our control. It's simply a challenge to ourselves to take a stand for what's right. The case for animal rights is one of common sense, logic and reality - and our habitual 'alien' habits are the only obstacles remaining. Fortunately we each happen to be powerful enough to remove them.

Do we need animal products to live?

The only thing that stands in the way of most of us accepting animal rights is the issue of 'needed use'. Animal rights are like human rights in that they are 'logically-granted' protection against abuse. However any right exists only so far as the violation of the right is needless - let me explain. If you were to be so unfortunate as to be involved in a plane crash, be washed up on a desolate island, and the only way to survive was to kill and eat another human on board - then there is no issue with human rights, as the right to live of the other passengers describes a right to not be killed *needlessly*. And in the instance where you have to kill or cause suffering for you to live, then it isn't needless anymore. It seems a little harsh when it is put so simply, but if a person *has to* violate a right in order to carry on living, then this negates any right that was in place in that particular situation. Consider also the case of self defence, if an aggressor (be they human or animal) attacks you with the intent of harm, then you are of course at liberty to defend yourself by any means necessary. The idea of rights isn't about great self-sacrifice, it's about sensible protection.

In society this point is not often bought up as we do not on the whole need to kill other humans in order to live, and neither do they need to kill us, so as a result we each have an almost universal right to live.

The relevance with animals is that people often don't see the deaths of animals as needless. It is of course seen as needless to kill an animal for it's fur, or to test cosmetics for us, as no right minded person is under the illusion that we need these items to live. However most people do believe we need to *eat* animal products to live, and so their suffering or deaths is not needless. However, due to our vast and ever-increasing knowledge of nutrition and lifestyle, we now know this to be the opposite of the case.

Most of our reasoning as to why we need animal products such as milk, meat or eggs to live is based on myths we learn as children, myths that our culture has yet to phase out (we must remember that less than 50 years ago blacks were still segregated from whites in most western cultures, we are far from a morally complete society yet). The following should help to dissolve some of those myths, and also show how it is the diet we eat which causes many of the health problems our society faces and spends so much money on failing to cure each year (money which of course could be spent on those who need it).

- Calcium is found in a lot of green vegetables, in far higher concentrations than you will find it in milk. An alarming fact that you don't learn about the calcium from dairy products, is that it is essentially void of any positive effect on your body. This is as, simply put, the nature of the acid-like milk protein saps calcium from your bones during digestion, and so the calcium actually does little but replace some of that which is lost (hence why osteoporosis, a disease of bone weakness, is actually more common in countries with higher dairy intakes). Why school doesn't tell you this is anybody's guess, presumably it's because the government creates the curriculum and also nutrition guides, while also having to uphold the economy which is heavily ingested with the dairy industry. Of course, the economy would comfortably survive the decline of the dairy industry as dairy alternatives (such as those alpro soya yoghurts, Swedish Glace ice cream and rice milks you might have seen in supermarkets) rose in popularity and created long term jobs instead of just relying on cows to do a lot of the work - but a short term decline or switch in the economy always looks bad for the government in power, and hence they are reluctant to accept it.

- Protein is found in much healthier concentrations in many beans. Soya beans in particular (considered the original super food for a very good reason!) have very high concentrations of protein, more than all types of meat we eat regularly in this country. More to the point, protein shouldn't be an issue at all - we eat far too much protein at current in this country, and foods which are high in protein should be avoided in the low-energy lifestyles in which most of us live. Not doing so has led to massive levels of obesity, which has a hand in many major illnesses.
- Omega 3 - this substance is found in many green vegetables and seeds, in high concentrations- the only reason it is present in fish is because they need to consume it for their own health. Eating nutrients like omega 3 from animal products is a bit like filtering the plant foods they come from through an animals digestive system before eating them.
- Cholesterol - this is a substance that the human body makes enough of for you to live healthily, and as a result taking any in your diet can become very dangerous. Other animals bodies also create cholesterol, so when we eat any animal product (including fish, dairy and eggs) we are eating another animals' cholesterol. Plant foods do not contain cholesterol so a vegan diet is completely cholesterol free. Excess cholesterol is the main source of heart disease, which kills 1/3 of all the people in the UK - that's 1 in every 3 of your family members, friends, everyone. Interestingly enough, no other meat eating species suffers ill-effects from cholesterol, no matter how much excess there is - which is one of the facts that shows humans have not yet developed to cope well with digesting animal products, casting serious biological doubt on whether we ever could. Vegan diets are prescribed to reverse heart disease, and in the vast majority of cases could easily do so – which would save the lives of almost 1/3 of all those that die each year in the western world.
- Cancers - these are often caused by a variety of things. Everyone knows that lung cancer is almost always caused by the inhalation of smoke into the lungs (ie, inhaling a dirty gas into a place that is only meant to process clean air) - smoking and pollution of course are the main factors (smoking by far the biggest!). Although we are far from perfect in our science of other cancers, there is a lot of evidence that the other internal organs act just like the lung - foreign substances continually entering an internal, fragile processing system that is meant for other things. As a result colon cancer has been heavily linked to meat consumption - our organs of digestion, in particular our intestines, are not short enough to be able to digest animal products like meat-eating species and so it has a bad effect on us. Colon cancer rates among beef eaters in particular tend to be much higher, though as yet highly unresearched. Interestingly enough, a study by Professor Jane Plant (supported by the largest nutritional study ever conducted called the China Study) claimed that breast and prostate cancer are heavily linked to dairy. Professor Plant's breast cancer clinic in London subsequently discovered that 80% of diagnosed terminal breast cancers go into remission upon changing to a vegan diet. The study of cancer and diet is largely un-researched, but the evidence so far supports the common sense on the matter - and shows good news for vegan diets.

In actuality, a vegan diet provides everything you need to live a healthier life - and it's only myths that hold up the idea that a historically vegetarian species like humans will find it hard to maintain itself on such a natural diet! In the words of Dr. T. Colin Campbell (conductor of the largest ever analysis of nutrition 'The China Study') :

"In every respect, vegans appear to enjoy equal or better health in comparison to both vegetarians and non-vegetarians."

Finally, perhaps the biggest myth of all is that it is difficult to go vegan. Perhaps in the 70s or 80s it was, but now this is just nonsense - it seems difficult only because we buy things that have so many animal products in. When you see the amount of serious health problems that go along with animal products though, it becomes almost a little naive to think it's hard to stop eating them. After all it's just habit led tastes that make us like these things - try going back to eating dairy cheese after a year of veganism, and you will realise just how bad these things really taste! How many kids liked drinking cows milk or eating cheese before being made to by their parents for the sake of calcium? Calcium being a nutrient we can't even reap the benefits of from dairy! Tastes do have to develop, and just as easily they will un-develop in a very short period. It's just a shame we're all school-taught that certain things are good for us when reasonable scientific analysis shows the opposite.

Alternatives do exist that make the transition to Veganism unbelievably easy nowadays - non-dairy ice cream is considered a 'posh' version of dairy ice cream as it's so much creamier, and 'vegan bacon' tastes the same but without the horrible fatty bits that most of us tore off! Going vegan has never been easier, and with such a strong moral and health argument behind it, not to mention the huge environmental advantages which haven't even been touched upon here, it really is a matter of 'when' not 'if' animal rights become accepted into society - the only question remaining is when will you take the step?