

Treating Animals Right

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A211 Tutorial

(A)

1. Would you agree to the following? Try to go with your intuitions without thinking too much about each case. (You will have the opportunity to return to this section at the end of the tutorial. You can look at it again then.

	YES	NO	DON'T KNOW
Using animals for their fur			
Using animals for their organs			
Using animals for meat			
Using animals for medical experimentation			
Using animals for their products (e.g. milk, eggs)			
Using animals as pets			
Using animals in commercial agriculture (e.g. to plough the earth—as people do in India)			
Using animals for testing cosmetics			
Using animals for therapy purposes at hospitals			
Keeping animals at the zoo			
Hunting animals for fun			
Using animals to advertise tea			
Using animals to carry bombs in Iraq			

2. Is there a general principle underlying your responses to all of the questions -- a principle of the form: *It is OK to use animals provided such and such conditions are met?* Think about this for a few minutes. Note your thoughts down; we'll return to this at the end of the tutorial.

(B)

Answer the following questions. Think carefully before committing yourself to an answer.

1. New cosmetic products are produced every day. Some of these are tested on animals so as to detect any side effects before they appear in the market. The same products could be tested on people directly but it would be time consuming, expensive, and possibly harmful. Are there any moral grounds why animal testing of cosmetics should not be allowed?

2. You are a member of a team of medical researchers working to find a cure for AIDS. You have developed what looks like a wonder drug, but you cannot judge how toxic it will be until you've tested it. However, the tests may well kill the subjects. Would you test the drug?

2'. Same as 2 except that for obscure chemical reasons, the only creatures it can be tested on are either humans or dogs. The tests will kill the subjects but the government is so desperate for a cure that it offers you the choice of experimental subjects: you can use (a) active, healthy, affectionate young dogs, (b) senile old people, (c) severely mentally handicapped children, or (d) newly born infants. Which would you choose and why?

3. You are away in your mountain retreat home. You have taken your pet along with you. You are away for a fortnight and have all you need, including food supplies. On your last day the weather turns bad and you are snowed in. The weather continues bad for another three weeks and you cannot leave. You have finished your meat supplies and all you have left is bread and pasta. But you crave for meat. There is your pet lying by the fireplace ... What would you do?

3'. Same scenario as 3 except that in your roof there are all sorts of birds that have nested there, and there is also your pet pigeon ... What would you do?

(C)

Read the following extract and answer the questions below it.

[S]uppose we consider that you and I, for example, do have value as individuals--what we'll call inherent value. To say we have such value is to say that we are something more than, something different from, mere receptacles. Moreover, to ensure that we do not pave the way for such injustices as slavery or sexual discrimination, we must believe that all who have inherent value have it equally, regardless of their sex, race, religion, birthplace and so on. Similarly to be discarded as irrelevant are one's talents or skills, intelligence and with, personality or pathology, whether one is loved and admired or despised and loathed. The genius and the retarded child, the prince and the pauper, the brain surgeon and the fruit vendor, Mother Teresa and the most unscrupulous used-car salesman -- all have inherent value, all possess it equally, and all have an equal right to be treated with respect, to be treated in ways that do not reduce the to the status of things, as if they existed as resources for others ...

Animals, it is true, lack many of the abilities human possess. They can't read, do higher mathematics, build a bookcase or make baba ghanoush. Neither can many humans beings, however, and yet we don't (and shouldn't) say that they (these humans) therefore have less inherent value, less of a right to be treated with respect, than do others. It is the similarities between those human beings who most clearly, most non-controversially have such value (the people reading this, for example), not our differences, that matter most. And the really crucial, the really basic similarity is simply this: we are each of us the experiencing subject of a life, a conscious creature having an individual welfare that has an importance to us whatever our usefulness to others. We want and prefer things, believe and feel things, recall and expect things. And all of these dimensions of our life, including our pleasure and pain, our enjoyment and suffering, our satisfaction and frustration, our continued existence or our untimely death -- all make a difference to the quality of our life as lived, as experienced, by us as individuals. As the same is true of those animals that concern us (the ones that are eaten and trapped, for example), they too must be viewed as the experiencing subjects of a life, with inherent value of their own.

(Tom Regan, 'The Case for Animal Rights'.)

1. Summarise Regan's argument for animal rights. (Consult the coursebook, p.119, if you need to.)
2. Has Regan, in your view, given the correct criteria for having rights?
3. Do you have any problems accepting Regan's views? If yes, explain what they are. (Page 51 might give you some ideas.)

(D)

Imagine you are on your way to visit friends. On the way you find a house on fire. The fire is so bad that you will have time to make only one trip into the house, before it becomes too risky. People tell you that a woman lives in the house with her pet chimp. Which would you save? Justify your response in the light of the theories you have read.

(E)

Discuss the following dialogue between Woody and Windy

Woody: You agree that it is morally wrong to kill humans, but what about creatures like dolphins, gorillas, stray cats, mosquitoes, ants, or bacteria?

Windy: I'd say that killing some of these creatures is clearly morally wrong. But I'm less sure about others. I certainly haven't got a problem killing bacteria. I always take extra care to exterminate them when I clean or wash. And I wouldn't find it difficult to kill mosquitoes. In fact I've done it many times.

Woody: But where do you draw the line? Is intelligence the criterion? Or is it something else, such as the sort of relationship you can have with the creature in question? And suppose you think you know what the criterion is, can you draw a precise enough line on the animal continuum such that you can say it is morally impermissible to kill all animals above the line but permissible to kill any of those below it?

How might Windy reply to Woody's questions?

(F)

Suppose it turns out that on any reasonable account of moral obligation, we have no moral obligations to animals whatsoever. Does it follow that we can feel free to do whatever we like to animals? (You might like to use Roger Scruton's views to discuss this question.)

(G)

If you have time, go back to section A and think about the cases there again. Consider the following questions

1. Have your initial intuitions changed?
2. What underlying general principle might be guiding your answers?
3. How might that general principle be justified?