

Question 1:

In his article, "All Animals are Equal," Peter Singer compares our society's current stance of a reduced or absent moral standing in regards to animals with the biases towards oppressed, or formerly oppressed, classes of humans such as women or black slaves (568). Singer states the aim of his arguments by saying, "I am urging that we extend to other species the basic principle of equality that most of us recognize should be extended to all members of our own species" (568-569).

Singer argues that our current basis for equality between races and sexes and differing classes of humans is on shaky ground if it rests only on the principle that these races, sexes and differing classes of humans are indeed completely the "same" or actually equal. What if a scientifically proven difference was found between black skinned races and white skinned races? Should we suddenly start discriminating again because of the difference? Singer goes on to point out the moral inconsistency that humans who are mentally retarded are not considered morally inferior, but a dog who is more intelligent than the mentally retarded human is somehow inferior (575).

The bed rock that Singer basis his argument that "the principle of equal consideration of interests" should be applied to animals rests on a quote from Bentham, "The question is not, Can they *reason?* nor, Can they talk? but, Can they *suffer?*" (qtd. 571). Singer concludes his article with a powerful comparison. Singer quotes a passage by Benn in which Benn ridicules the idea of giving animal's equal rights: Singer then asks the reader to make mental substitutions of words such as "black" for "dog"

and “white” for “men” in Benn’s passage (576). The power in this conclusion comes from allowing the reader to see the sudden change in their own feelings, and the possible inconsistency of these feelings, that the substitution of words results in.

Question 2:

In his article Singer deals with the inequality of moral standing, and thus consideration, given to animals by society solely because of convenience and custom. Singer also points out that philosophers have not thought the issue of animal inequality through thoroughly and that this is a moral failure on their part.

Question 3:

In its essence Singer’s argument is simple: The principle of equality is self-evident and true and should be applied across all boundaries—including the boundaries of race, sex and species. Singer points out that granting equality to animals is no different from, and will require the same “expansion of our moral horizons,” that was needed when, as a society, we granted equality of moral standing to formerly oppressed groups such as women and black slaves (568).

Question 4:

I find that Singer’s arguments are valid. Singer states, “No matter what the nature of the being the principle of equality requires that its suffering be counted equally with like suffering – in so far as rough comparisons can be made – of any other being” (571). Given that it is now generally accepted that animals can feel pain and suffer then it would follow that they do deserve moral standing.

Many people might misinterpret Singer's argument for "equality" and find it unreasonable if they assumed that Singer's "equality" meant "equal rights." Equal rights for my dog would be unreasonable, after all, my dog does not need to vote, however, moral equality for Singer means taking differences into consideration—and not considering differences to be a barrier to equality. Taken from this perspective equality for animals could be reasonable.

I do not think that this idea of equality for animals can work at this time. There are way too many people who make money off of the system that is in place at this time. Think how massive the battle to end human slavery was, there is no practical way that animals can be given equality at this time in our society, too much depends on their continued exploitation. The flaw that I find in Singer's article is simply that it does not offer a practical way to implement the conclusion.

#### Question 5:

In my opinion animals do feel, are capable of suffering, and should in fact have the moral "equality" that Singer speaks of. However, as I stated before, I do not believe that popular acceptance of moral equality for animals is possible in our society today. The "special interests," in this case i.e. farmers, laboratories, researchers, our average meat eaters, are not going to be interested in giving up the money or products that come as a byproduct of viewing animals as morally inferior any more than black slave owners were willing to give up the wealth created from slave ownership. If we consider that people have owned other people as slaves with skin color the only justification needed, then obviously animals hardly stand a chance of achieving moral "equality" in the near future.

I do believe that on a philosophical level we need as a society to start thinking in terms of moral equality for animals, but I actually fear that on a practical level that pushing too hard for moral equality for animals might have a backlash effect as it polarizes animal “supporters” and “opponents”: PETA versus farmers, Greenpeace versus whaling ships...our culture is littered with the clash between those that argue for moral equality for animals and those that support human superiority. I think that in order to eventually gain popular acceptance of the idea that animals should be considered to have moral equality that it would be necessary to start by getting people used to the idea first, comfortable with it, and then to step by step slowly wean society off of its dependence on the products of animal suppression.

## Works Cited

Singer, Peter "All Animals are Equal." *Bioethics: An Anthology*. Ed. Helga Khuse and Peter Singer. Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2006. 568-577 Print