

The Moral Status of Animals

LECTURE 2 – HUMAN-ANIMAL STUDIES

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IAS EARLY CAREER FELLOW

Contents

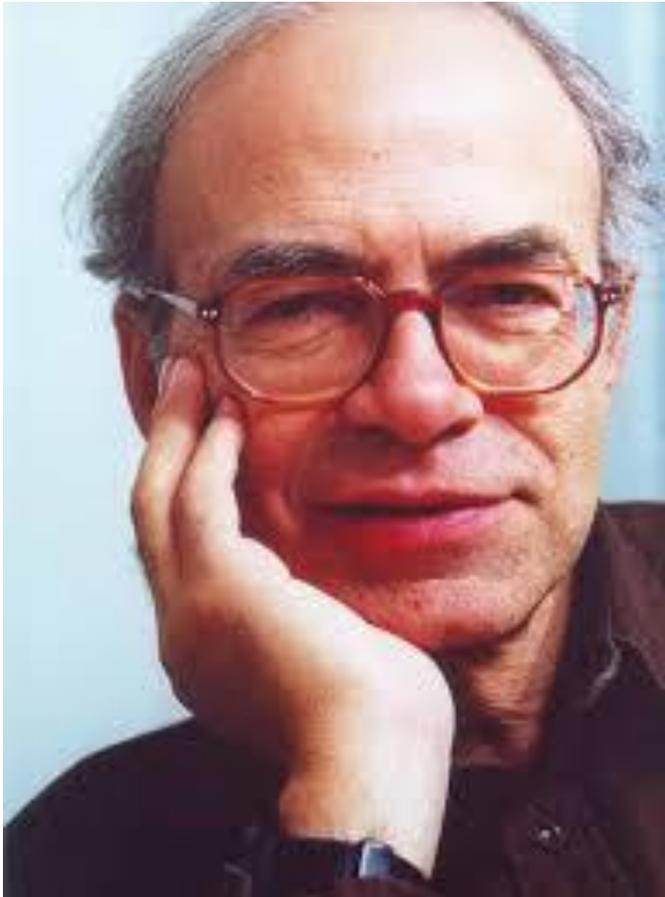
1. Background on animal ethics in Western philosophy
2. Various philosophical formulations of arguments pertaining to the moral status of animals (plus counter-claims)
 - a. UTILITARIAN
 - b. RIGHTS
 - c. RELATIONAL
3. Some of the political implications of these formulations



1. Animal Ethics in the History of Western Philosophy

- Pythagoras (c. 570 BC – c. 495 BCE) - Vegetarian (?); ‘Metempsychosis’
- Aristotle (384–322 BCE) - *History of Animals*; Taxonomy of souls
- The Church Fathers (Tertullian (AD 155-160)) - Asceticism/‘moral purity’
- René Descartes (1596 – 1650) - ‘mechanistic’
- Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) - ‘Indirect moral duties’: ‘He who is cruel to animals becomes hard also in his dealings with men. We can judge the heart of a man by his treatment of animals’ (*Lectures on Ethics*).
- Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) – ‘**What else is it that should trace the insuperable line?** Is it the faculty of reason, or perhaps the faculty of discourse? But a full-grown horse or dog is beyond comparison a more rational, as well as a more conversable animal, than an infant of a day or a week or even a month old. But suppose they were otherwise, what would it avail? **The question is not, Can they reason? nor Can they talk? but, Can they suffer?’**” (*The Principles of Morals and Legislation*, 1789)

2. Animal Ethics – 20th Century to Present



2. a. Utilitarianism

- Maximising utility
- ‘the greatest happiness for the greatest number’
- Types of Utilitarianism (act, rule, preference, total, average, negative, etc.)

Peter Singer (preference utilitarian)

- ‘The capacity for suffering and enjoyment is a prerequisite for having interests at all, a condition that must be satisfied before we can speak of interests in a meaningful way’. (Singer, 1975: 9).
- ‘Equal consideration of interests’

2. a. Utilitarianism - Objections

- A crude 'aggregation' – 'summing together all pleasures and pains' (Nussbaum, 2006)
- 'Utility monsters' - who get enormously greater gains in utility from any sacrifice of others than these others lose. For, unacceptably, **the theory seems to require that we all be sacrificed in the monster's maw, in order to increase total utility.** (Nozick, 1999)
- Slavery objection - **'If slavery is wrong, it is only because the practice fails to maximize the good, not because of the inviolability or dignity of persons.'** (DeGrazia, 1991)
- Poverty of its value theory – only preferences count as morally significant
 - Cf. Rachels (1983: 254) - "when a mentally sophisticated being dies, there are more reasons why the death is a bad thing."

2. b. Rights

- Ethical, legal, social principles of *entitlement* or *freedom*
- *Collaborative* - ‘some sort of agreement’ / ‘mutual advantage’ / ‘contractual’
- *Deontological* – rule-based ethics
- Includes *Negative freedoms* – e.g. freedom from interference
- Who qualifies? (species membership, certain cognitive capacity, etc.)
- *Speciesism* - ‘How can one defend the idea that human beings are ends, while nonhuman beings are means? ... Human rights are not *human*’ (Cavaliere, 2005)

2. b. Rights

Tom Regan

- ‘Moral agents’ vs. ‘moral patients’
- **‘Treatment’ - Moral patients cannot do what is right or wrong**, we have said, and in this respect they differ fundamentally from moral agents. But moral patients can be on the receiving end of the right or wrong acts of moral agents, and so in this respect resemble moral agents.
- ‘Subjects of a life’
- individuals are subjects-of-a-life if they have beliefs and desires; perception, memory, and a sense of the future
- **‘They have ‘inherent value’ and this value is ‘irreducible’**”
- **‘It is not an act of kindness to treat animals respectfully. It is an act of justice’.**

2. b. Rights - Objections

- **Reductios** (extreme rights extensions, disruptive reforms)
- Rights as ‘**reciprocal**’?
- ‘they are . . . claims, or potential claims, within a community of moral agents. Rights arise, and can be intelligibly defended, only among beings who actually do, or can, make moral claims against one another’. (Carl Cohen, 1986: 865)
- Category error?: Does the awarding of rights logically follow from display of preference?
 - ‘Repeatedly we encounter the same fallacious passage from the premise that animals have interests to the conclusion that animals have rights’ (Cohen, 2001)
- **Objectification** – capacity-based ethics frames the animal as ‘something with the status of “what” as opposed to “who.” [...] As long as animal ethics proceeds according to these standards and protocols, it will continue to endorse questionable practices that often serve to reinforce the moral problems it initially sought to contest and correct’. (Coeckelbergh & Gunkel, 2014: 721)

2. c. 'Relational'

- Subjectivities not the absolute horizon of moral consideration (*Politics of Species – Reshaping Our Relationship with Other Animals* – Corbey and Lanjouw)
- Eschewing 'attempts to ground ethics in ahistorical, transcendental norms' (Sapontzis, 1987)
- 'things are embodiments of relational networks' (Taussig, 2010: 136)
- Levinas: 'we may say that relations are "prior" to the relata' (Coeckelbergh, 2012: 45)

Keeping open discursive possibilities does not 'advance a straightforward normative position' it aims instead 'to think, as Heidegger often describes it, what has been unthought'. (Coeckelbergh & Gunkel, 2014: 728)

Margaret Midgely (also, Richard Nozick, Steve Sapontzis, Nussbaum, etc.)

- 'Social-bondedness'
- The special interest which parents feel in their own children is not a prejudice, nor is the tendency which most of us would show to rescue, in a fire or other emergency, those closest to us. We are bond-forming creatures, not abstract intellects. (Midgely, 1984)

2. c. 'Relational' – Objections

- the normative suggestions are very **vague**
- the relation between reason and emotion is never clearly explicated (Russow, 1985: 174)
- it is never successfully explained why **racism** could not be justified along the lines of a defense which gives priority to those "closer" to us (esp. Midgely)
- Need for rigour to countervail Anthropocentrism – Evaluation of what '**a life with dignity**' means ... 'we need to remember that we are relatively ignorant of what a good life for each sort of animal is and strongly biased in favor of our own power interests' (Nussbaum, 2006)

'I don't care that it's wrong'



'...I'm not gunna pretend I'm doing something that's ok just because it doesn't think or something'.

Are moral

arguments always
retrospective...?

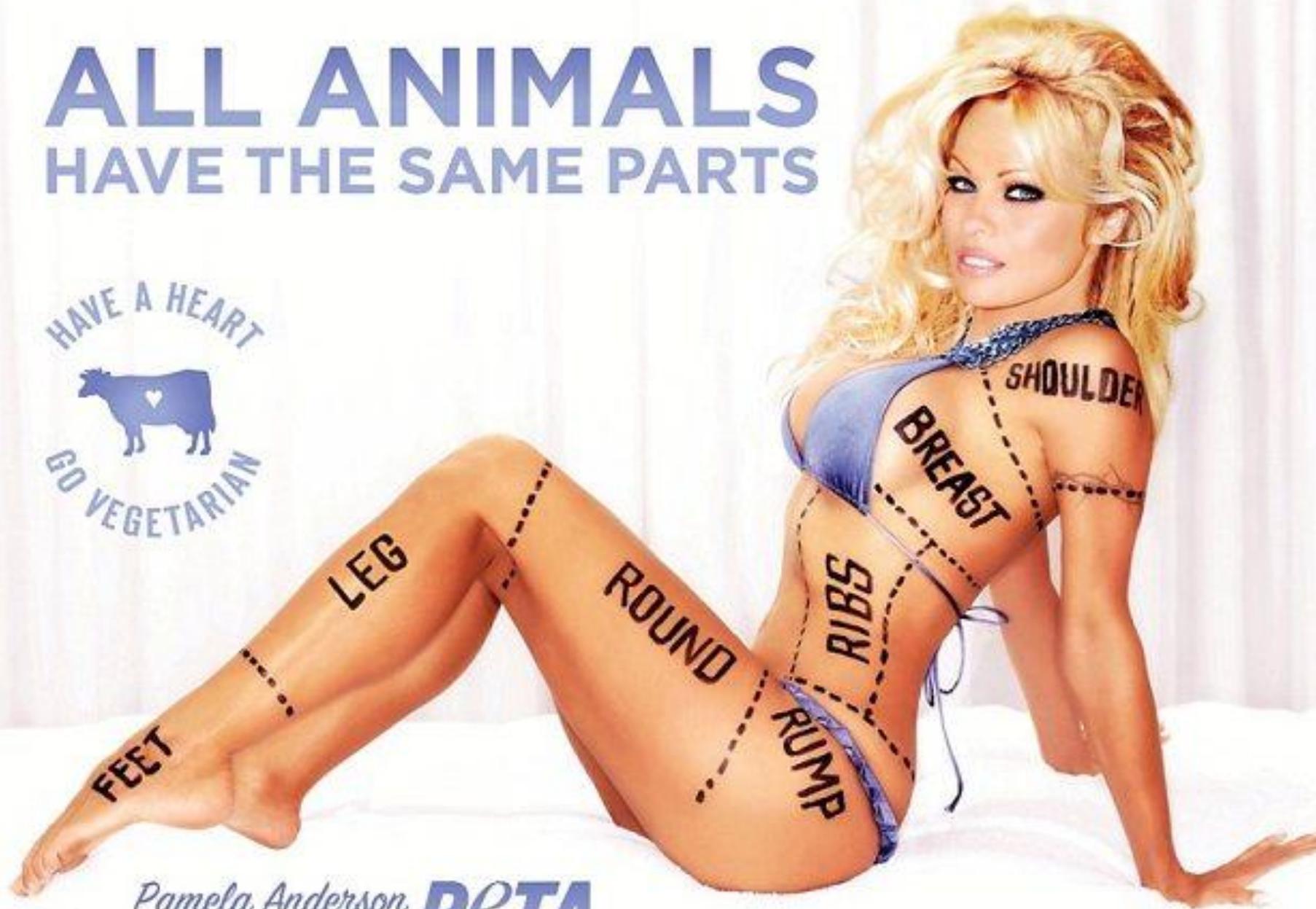
There is no kind way to rip
the skin off an animal's back.
Say **NO** to fur and fur trim.

ASHLEY JAMES
FOR *PETA*



HARVEY NICHOLS:
HERE'S THE REST OF THAT FUR COAT

ALL ANIMALS HAVE THE SAME PARTS



Pamela Anderson FOR **PETA**

©PETA

**HUMAN
MEAT**

WEIGHT: 72 KG

PACKED: 20/03/2012

TYPE: FREE RANGE



8177 1888 0188

animal





Pigs have a tremendous sense of smell. The large round disk of cartilage at the tip of the snout is connected to muscle that gives it extra flexibility and strength for rooting in the ground. #FactFriday #Compassion

For more info: www.drbronner.co.uk/compassion

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"ALL-ONE!"

3. Political implications

- What about emotion? (role of disgust, guilt, ritualisation: see Herzog, H., & Golden, L. (2009) and Jacobsson, K., & Lindblom, J. (2013))
- Construction of the self and other – ‘liberal individualism’ (DeGrazia)
- Legal contexts - ‘it would imply for these animals a shift from the condition of objects to that of subjects of legal rights’ (Cavalieri, 2005)
- Environmental contexts – combatting what Thomas Birch calls ‘imperial power mongering’ – keeping open discursive possibilities.
- **Part of understanding moral arguments is understanding their limitations (‘problem of other minds’)**

The 'Non-human Person'



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