

## Why Should We Care For Non-Human Life? A Discussion From The Ethical Point Of View

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### **Abstract:**

*In the present paper, I would like to discuss the value of non-human life regarding the ethical investigation of whether non-human animals have intrinsic value in their living creature. Here, I want to discuss the possible answers regarding some relevant questions such as, on what grounds animals are different from human? Is there any possible equality between human and animal? Is animal killing wrong? Can a non-human animal be a person? And finally, why should we care for non-human life? All possible replies would be discussed from the ethical point of view. In the present day scenario, the ecological imbalance due to misuse of non-human resources is considered as an important matter of the emerging study of ethics. We observe that non-human animals are facing several tremendous crises, such as the abuse of non-human entity and randomly killing of animal life. The trend towards animal killing is now regarded as a common attitude of both developed and undeveloped countries; but it is a serious issue to the whole world. Speciesism and Biocentrism deal with the above issue and propose different views from the ethical point of view. As a branch of applied ethics, animal ethics considers this problem by focusing the different arguments based on moral principles, and it opens the possible as well as alternative solutions by which the value of non-human entity can be justified. Actually, we need some necessary moral justifications for taking the value of animal life. For it, applied ethics offers the notion 'Reverence for life' as a moral principle.*

**Keywords:** non-human life, intrinsic value, animal-killing, crisis, possible equality, care for animal life.

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### **I. Introduction**

In the present day ecological scenario, non-human beings are facing different crisis in every moment and in everywhere in their daily life. Environmental problem concerning the existence of living being and their interest is presently considered as not only a big problem but also a serious crisis of our glob. It is not true that only human being has the value of life, modern environmental ethics (applied) strongly claims that like human being non-human being has also value of life. But intellectual human tradition believes that only human beings having their moral awareness can judge what is wrong and what is right which is not found in non-human life. So, non-human life has no moral value like human life. They (including the value of their existence) cannot be considered from the ethical point of view. For human interest, it strongly supports the view that there is no harm in the case of random killing of non-human being. Speciesism holds that good or bad for non-human life can be determined on the ground of human interest. The value of human life cannot be compared with any other animals. This is nothing but a merely human centric moral consideration.

But, modern environmental science promotes the view: 'For the healthy environment along with deep ecology we must need to prevent the non-human life'. In spite of this suggestion and several laws in favour of non-human life, there is no noticeable change in the climate of random killing of non-human life. Regretfully speaking, we often forget that environment is the sum of surroundings of nature and living organism including living standard of human beings and non-human beings. Now, we have to consider some important questions, these are: Is there any special value of animal life? Is animal killing wrong? Is equality for non-human being (or animal) possible? And, why should we care for non-human life? It is no doubt a debatable issue on whether we should care only for ourselves or for others behind our gross interest. But, the actual fact is that random killing of non-human life by the human beings is treated as a big crisis not only for all non-human beings but also for human beings in the human society. And, this tremendous trend is now accepted as a common attitude, but considered as a serious issue to the both - developed as well as developing countries. Animal ethics, as a branch of applied ethics, deals with human's beliefs, attitudes and activities about the moral status of non-human beings. It considers this serious issue from the ethical point of view. Biocentrism also holds that every life has

an intrinsic value. So, like human life, animal life has also intrinsic value. Many thinkers claim that this argument is so sufficient that it alone can establish the important value of non-human life.

## **II. Value of Non-human Life**

In general, we very often say that life is sacred. But we are not ready to imply this view in the real life. We very often try to avoid this holistic view due to our greed. We do not want to stop in satisfaction of our needs what we desire; rather we always try to fulfil our greed which comes from our unlimited demand. In order to fulfil our demand, we are killing animal life without any argumentation in favour of the value animal life. In our busy schedule of work, we have no time to think about whether randomly animal killing is right or wrong. In our society, animal killing is not a serious matter, whereas human-killing is considered as a murder and a serious punishable offence. Even, the capital punishment can be applicable for a murderer. It means that human life has special value which is not possible for animal life. We take special care for human life, because human has special value on the earth on the ground that he has reasoning power with super consciousness. But, animal life is not like human. Regarding this situation of discrimination, Peter Singer asked a question, 'Why should human life have special value?' (Peter Singer, 2000, p.83). Actually, this question indirectly indicates another question: Is there any special value of animal life? According to William Lillie, the word "value" has come to ethics by the way of economics; it is used to indicate the standard of an object that has the capacity to satisfy human need or desire. The term is also used for indicating the changes of amount, standard of wealth, worthy, etc. For instance, market value, price value, changes of value, etc. But, in ethics, the term "value" is used from the moral point of view. Moral value depends on a condition of whether a thing or an action right or wrong, good or bad. It is not to say that a morally good object means it has the capability to satisfy our basic needs or gross interest what we desire. Many electrical tools have the instrumental value, because these are necessary to make any electrical device. But, ethics deals with intrinsic value which is a value of an object as a whole or a value as inherent in object internally. In other words, intrinsic value is an inner value of an object. For example, humanity is the very essence of human being; here 'humanity' is an intrinsic value of human being. In this way, we can also say that human life has intrinsic value as a whole, not as a part of body (Lillie, 2001, p.207-210).

In applied ethics, Speciesism holds that the human life has more morally important value than other non-human or animal life. The status of good for animal life depends on the human interest. The human life is undoubtedly valuable which cannot be compared with any other non-human animals. Some thinkers support the special value of human life by the following qualities of human being.

1. Human life has a special value than other living beings because the sanctity or purity of human life.
2. A person as a human being has the right to life.
3. A person as a human being has the right to choice.
4. Human life has the autonomy – the capacity to choose, to make and to act according to own decision.
5. Human life has reasoning power with self-consciousness.
6. For advantage, human being is able to invent technological tools and use these with some methods.
7. Only human life has future plan, only human being is able to claim the right. Non-human beings are not able to claim their rights.
8. Human life has a greater awareness about what is happening.
9. Moral principles are created by human and applicable only for human life, so these are not applicable for other animals.
10. Human life having infinite nature of creation is innovative, which has modern language for better communication, but animals are not like human.

In fact, human beings have the above qualities. Some supporters of this view strongly argue that, animals have no such qualities for which we should have to consider their special value. Even, they also try to ignore the special value of animal life in the environment. Bentham claims that animals have no ability to make tools; they have no capability to use language or linguistic sign what human beings use to express their thought. Some philosophers also support this view to ignore the special value of non-human being. They strongly claim that non-human beings have neither reasoning power nor thinking ability. For this reason, they have no ability for conceptualization, no self-consciousness. They are not really conscious as human beings. They have no thinking ability. They cannot consider themselves as special animals or distinct entities. Even, they have no autonomy or any ability to choose anything for one's life (Peter Singer, 2000, pp.72-73). We very often try to establish ourselves as morally conscious beings and try to ignore the value of animal life because they have no moral status. Finally, animal life is not great or valuable like human life. In fact, the above view is called Raw Speciesism which strongly claims that only human beings have conscious souls, but animals have no such souls, so 'human is human, but animal is animal'; we cannot deny the distinction. This is nothing but a merely human centric moral consideration (S. K. Pal, 2012, p.185).

It is not true to say that animal life has no value. But, we must give more priority to the self-conscious being than the other animals those have no self-consciousness. Some non-utilitarian thinkers claim that in the

case of suffering for human and non-human life, human being will be treated as more important than the animal, because human life is more valuable than the life of non-human animals. But, the possible reply to the above claim that here are many intellectually disabled persons who have no ability to be regarded as self-conscious human beings. The situation where human baby has no self-conscious is not differing from the case where non-human baby has less consciousness. Even, we very often observe that intellectually disabled person has no higher moral awareness than non-human animal. If the suffering of intellectually disabled person is morally considered as an important or serious matter, then it would be equally serious to the case of non-human beings those are suffering (Peter Singer, 2000, pp.77-78). Paul W. Taylor, a modern American philosopher, also supports this view by saying that all human beings including wild living non-human beings have intrinsic value, and for it, the non-human beings will be the subject matter of moral consideration. He calls it "Respect for Nature". He also says, "The inherent worth of an entity does not depend on its merits. To consider something as possessing inherent worth, we have seen, is to place intrinsic value on the realization of its good." (Taylor, P., 1981, p.11) Elizabeth Anderson, an American philosopher, strongly supports animal rights and the view that promotes intrinsic value of animal life. She says, "I believe that animals have intrinsic value, that is, value in their own right, not derived from the ways they serve human welfare. Indeed, I believe that living things in general have intrinsic value, as individual organisms and as systematically related in ecosystems and the biosphere as a whole."(Anderson, 2005, p.1)

### **III. Killing of Animal Life – An Ethical Consideration**

Now, an important question may be raised here, is animal killing wrong? The Aristotelian view is that plants exist for the sake of animals, and animals exist for the sake of man, so it is not harmful to take them as food for our needs. In the medieval period, both St. Augustine and Thomas Aquinas followed the Aristotle's view. They argued that if human beings do not kill animals, then it indirectly means the killing of human. Aquinas openly said, ".....it is not unlawful if man uses plants for the good of animals, and animals for the good of man...." Even, the Bible does not provide us any certain view regarding the relationship between human and animal. In the Genesis-1, we observe that the God gives us all authority to control the all things that was created on the earth. This view promotes the use of animal for the sake of human life. In other words, the existence of animal life on the earth is to serve human needs. (Regan & Singer, 1976. pp.5; 10-11 Cf. Pal, 2014-15, pp.113-118).

Strong Speciesism holds that only human life has greater importance than the other animals or non-human life. Only human life is pure, other non-human beings are not pure. Here purity or sanctity depends on the ability of awareness and capability of consciousness. It also holds that every human life, as a conscious being, likes to give importance to the other members of his homo-sapiens group to which they belong. This view does not support any greater importance for non-human life, but it promotes minimum or less importance for animal life. But this view is not free from objection. Several objections may be raised here. If only human life has greater importance than the other animals, then why does a great person give importance to his dogs and their babies? Another objection is that if the above view of Strong Speciesism is right, then the fact will come in front of us to be happened that many great as well as important persons will treat other persons as less important animals. Some thinkers support the view of *The Divine Command Argument* which holds that our valuable life is created by the God who has given us the supreme authority to kill animal life for our own interest. Some religions have strongly promoted this type of argument. But, it is true from the positive attitude of rationality that this view is nothing other than a dogmatic attitude towards the killing of animal life (S. K. Pal, 2012, pp.187-190).

Environmental science suggests that if we randomly kill animals, it will be main cause of imbalance of ecosystem. Abuse of animal life is a harmful practice of human society; it is happened due to the lack of awareness. So, we should have to take special care for other non-human entities for our environment. For it, we should have to understand the value of both living and non-living resources. Of course, some speciesists think that the value of different lives would be considered in a hierarchical manner, it means the value of different lives can be placed (ordered) in numerically as per their qualities, such as higher (human) to lower (animal). But, if we take the different lives from the view that recognises the equal value for all creatures, it would be better for us to treat non-human beings as valuable creatures. Those who accept this view suggest that animal life, like human life, should be considered as the subject matter of the detail study of philosophy. (Peter Singer, 2000, p.105).

We all know that 'right to life' has been established in the international domain of human rights. It includes the protection and promotion of person's life and personal liberty. Some argue that if non-human animals are persons, then they should have the right. In this regard, Peter Singer mentions a question that is relevant here; can a non-human animal be a person? We have observed that the killing of human life is more serious punishable offence than the killing of non-human animal life. But, why? Because human life is a person's life, whereas animal is not a person. Generally speaking, it is not suitable to call animal a person.

Because, they have neither rationality nor any ability of self-consciousness. But, it is not the sufficient reason to differ human being from other non-human entities. In this regard, Peter Singer says, “There are many beings who are sentient and capable of experiencing pleasure and pain, but are not rational and self-conscious, and so not persons. I shall refer to these beings as conscious being. Many nonhuman animals almost certainly fall into this category.”(Peter Singer, 2000, p.101) We have observed that there are some animals those have the mental ability by which they can be self-conscious entities. For instance, chimpanzees are very conscious in the cases of failure and success, they use their conscious mind to learn proper technique by which success would be achieved. (Peter Singer, 2000, pp.110-111) Even, they try to realize the human language and try to reply through their voice or body language. Moreover, many non-human animals have the capacity to understand the human activities, to feel human love, emotion, order, pain, pleasure etc. So, we should have to think whether we will morally support the random killing of animal life or not.

#### **IV. Possibility of Equality for Non-human Life**

Now, we can consider the *non-human life* from the ethical point of view. For the universal aspect of ethics, there are different ethical ideals or moral principles – such as justice, equality, purity, individual right to life, sanctity of life, reverence for life, and many more (Peter Singer, 2000, p.14). Now, the question may be raised here, According Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy (2021), after the France revolution, the concept of equality has been considered as an important socio-political ideal. In the present day scenario, it is not only a contested concept, but also a leading controversial ideal. The concept of equality can be defined and explained in the different ways. The word “equality” is derived from the Latin word ‘aequitas’ which signifies the qualitative relationship between two or more than two groups. Though, the word “equality” is not same or identical with the word “identity”. Equality refers to the correspondence between two or many groups which have same quality in the specific aspect, but not all aspects. But, identity, on the other and, refers to one and the same object corresponding to itself and all its features. It is not the same as similarity. So, we cannot use the word “equality” to indicate the likely-objects in the sense of similarity. Equality cannot be used for the same sense of “similarity”. When we use the sentence “Men and women are equal”, here we do not want to say that men and women are identical. On the ground of same reason, it is possible to say that human being and non-human being are not identical.

But, a question may be raised here, is equality for non-human being (or animal) possible? According to Tamkin Larry, equality is a fundamental goal of justice. (Tamkin Larry, 1993, p.7). So, equality must be added when we claim proper justice for all human beings and consider it also for non-human life in the environment. When we say, ‘equality is necessary for the possibility of good life’, here equality means an affirmative or a positive action which is considered as the moral principle of equality. Sometimes, it is used to indicate a situation that is free of discrimination. Weak Speciesism claims that animals have no moral status, because they have no sense of morality. For animal, the following qualities are necessary for the possibility of moral status.

(i) Self-consciousness, (ii) ability of language utilization, (iii) receiving ability of sensation or feelings, (v) sense of freedom, (vi) concept of right and duty, (vii) ability of claiming own right, (viii) moral responsibility and rationality. From the practical point of view especially from the side of our need and greed, we accept the discrimination between human and non-human life. According to Rawls, if we are human in the sense that we are ethical as well as moral, then we must have a sense of justice (Peter Singer, 2000, p.18). In the theory of evolution, Darwin clearly mentions that there is no fundamental difference between man and higher mammals in their mental faculties. According to him, it is not true that higher animals have neither ability for sensation nor capability for feelings. In fact, higher non-human beings have the mental ability to feel pain and pleasure, misery and happiness. Not only that, they have the ability to create complex emotion Darwin says, “Everyone has seen how jealous a dog is of his master’s affection, if lavished on other creature; and I observed the same fact with monkeys. This shows that animals not only love, but have also desire to be loved.”(Regan & Singer, 1976. p.29; Cf. Pal, 2014-15, p.122).

Finally, according to Peter Singer, it would be wrong if we treat intellectually disable human entity nothing other than a non-human entity or animal, may be they are not able to process any higher capacities, they are however human beings. Similarly, no higher non-human creature would be human. We have already given a special kind of moral status to human being which is not given to non-human entities. In fact, it is kind of attitude to ignore the interests of billions of sentient creatures. We cannot deny the situation; rather we should have to rectify this situation by taking the possibility of moral principle which will be in favour of non-human life. He said, “It is no more than a possibility. The change I have suggested might make no difference to our treatment of humans, or it might even improve it.”(Peter Singer, 2000, pp.76-77).

#### **V. Care for Non-human Life**

As a branch of practical ethics, the environmental ethics especially animal ethics provides the different ethical ideas, ideals and policies by which non-human beings can be designated as morally valuable living

beings. The killing of animal life is considered as an important cause of imbalance of ecosystem. Many deontological theorists mention the argument which claims that we have no direct moral duty for the existence of non-human beings, because non-human beings are nothing other than animals. Thus, they have no humanity and their acts are inhuman and dangerous which damage themselves (Kant, 1997, p.240). Following this view, some argue that we have no duty for the existence of non-human beings. This view is not free from criticism. Many critics of killing of animal life have come from different perspectives and different fields. Some of them oppose this view on moral ground. Contemporary utilitarian thinker J. Bentham and modern ethicist Peter Singer strongly argue that the view that provides that non-human beings cannot be morally considered is not treated as a view of mankind. We observe some cases where we serve our moral duty for someone who has no humanity. If non-human beings are considered as morally designated living beings, then we must have the responsibility for them to protect their life for our healthy environment (Pal, 2012, pp.209-210).

For taking special care for non-human life, a question may be raised here: Can a non-human animal be a person (like human)? Indeed, it is no doubt a debatable issue. We have already seen that Raw Speciesism holds that 'human is human, but animal is animal', and strongly rejects same value which is applicable for human. Generally, a living entity is called a person when it is rational and self-conscious being. Are non-human animals rational and self-conscious? The positive answer is that some of them are rational and self-conscious beings. Even, they are able to understand what human being tries to indicate, and also able to use the special type of language for their verbal communication. Not only that, some animals are able to identify own images reflexed on the mirror. It is proved that gorilla has the capability to learn the sign of language. Patterson observes that a gorilla named Koko is speaking in English and singing a song very smoothly. In this regard, Peter Singer mentions Goodall's description on the fact that Figan (a young wild chimpanzee of Tanzania) has a complex set of intentions and has the knowledge or skill of how to get banana by using the plan and tools. It follows that some non-human animals must have self-awareness; they must have the awareness about their distinctness. He also says, "Some non-human animals are persons, as we have defined the term.....I suggested that if human life does have special value or a special claim to be protected, it has it in so far as most human beings are persons. But if some non-human animals are persons, too, the lives of those animals must have the same special value or claim to protection." (Peter Singer, 2000, pp.110-117). Therefore, they have the special value, even intrinsic value; and we should have to take special care for their existence.

Biocentrism advocates the 'Reverence for life' as a moral principle. At first, Albert Schweitzer, a German philosopher, introduced this concept for protecting the non-human life on the earth. He received *Nobel Peace Prize* in 1952 for his philosophy of 'Reverence for Life'. Later, many thinkers support this concept and explain it from the ethical point of view. He tries to say that every life has its own value; it means both human and non-human life has intrinsic value, and it can be considered as the basic ground of environmental ethics. According to Buddhism, human beings as a member of a society cannot act only for their own interests, they should realize that they are not the only living beings in the world, there are other non-human beings those are related to them directly and indirectly. (Tachibana, 2013, p.278) Some thinkers who support the positive aspects of animal ethics argue that non-human animals have at least conscious life and finally they are living beings, so they should be treated as conscious living beings and must be subjected to the ethical consideration. Many thinkers who support animal rights and explain these from the philosophical point of view argue that all non-human animals have independent moral value without any utility of human interest. So, human, for self-interest, cannot violate animal rights. If we respect human rights especially 'right to life' we must respect animal rights which promote no use of animal for hard labour, no torture with animals, no violation with animals, no use of animal life for experiment and no killing of animal life for human interest. Philosophy of animal rights also holds that there is no moral difference between human and animals. Thus, what is harm for environment if we serve our moral duties for the existence of non-human animals? Again, what will be harmful, if we take special care for non-human animals? Even, what is the problem if human beings respect non-human animals with their inherent moral values?

## **VI. Conclusion**

Throughout the discussion, it is obviously true that the abuse of animal as well as killing of animal life are now considered as harmful practices of human society; it is quietly happened due to the lack of awareness. In fact, the basic human attitude is that animals are here (on the earth) only for the purpose of human needs. So, animal killing is not unethical. But, we all know that environmental science clearly opens the view which suggests that randomly killing of non-human animals is the main cause of imbalance of ecosystem. If we destroy our ecosystem, then it will be harmful to all of us to exist here as living creature. So, for environmental sustainability, we should have to take special care for other non-human entities. In the world view, there are some laws which are applicable to protect animal life and promote animal right. But, people very often deny these for fulfilling their gross interests. In fact, legal laws are necessary but these are not enough. In this situation, we should have to understand the value of both living and non-living resources. Speciesism includes

animal life in order to fulfil human interest and strongly claims that good or bad for non-human life is based on the ground of human interest. Supporters of this view claim that we have no need to admit special value for non-human life. But, we have already known that this view is merely a human centric view which has no response to the ecosystem of environment where we are living together. Animal ethics clearly points out that the different scientific experiments on animal life (especially on chimpanzee) prove that many non-human animals have self-awareness. So, ‘the value of human life cannot be compared with any other animals’ - this is nothing but a merely human centric moral consideration. A large number of modern thinkers strongly support the view of Elizabeth Anderson, which holds that non-human beings have intrinsic value. For taking special care for non-human life, we should have to follow Albert Schweitzer’ notion ‘Reverence for life’, biocentrism deals with this notion and extends it as a moral principle. In order to protect the non-human life, many famous personalities accept the principle non-violence as a moral law and became vegetarian. Pythagoras, an ancient Greek philosopher and a great mathematician, accepted the view of transmigration of soul between human and animal. On the basis of religious teaching and ethical principles, he became totally vegetarian and loved non-human beings from his core-heart. He wanted that like philosophers all human beings should be vegetarian. For minimizing the animal killing, Mahatma Gandhi also accepted vegetarianism as recommended by Dr. B. W. Richardson in the book *Food for Man*. (Iyer, 1999, p.84) The modern Indian scholar Prof. B. K. Matilal rightly writes: The religious teaching of Buddhism recommends the moral virtue ‘*ahimsā*’ (non-violence) for maintaining the moral principle “respect for life”, which also says that we cannot destroy any life, may be it is human life or animal life. In a human society, killing of animal life must be prohibited; any violence against human or animal life is harmful to our fellow beings. Therefore, we need some necessary moral justifications for taking the value of animal life. (Matilal, 2015, p.257).

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