BIO-ETHICAL DISCOURSE ON ANIMALS' RIGHTS AND HUMAN RESPONSIBILITY

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Abstract

Opinion are divided among scholars concerning the fundamental rights of non-human animals as they have suffered a great deal in the hands of humankind who rather than maltreat them should have the duty to protect them. This research probes into the question of animal suffering and how this evokes ethical positions. It is concerned with and engages the ultimate question of what the human ethical responsibility towards non-human animals is, considering that fundamental rights of animals have suffered a great deal in the hands of humankind who rather have the duty to protect them. The research adopted a critical analytic method with which it has evaluated the human treatment of non-humans. Data was collected from the primary source by way of interview and observations and secondary source from text books, journals, internet materials etc. It has discovered that, fundamentally, the true test of human morality consists of the attitudes towards the rights of non-human animal species at our mercy of human. The research engaged critical discourses that bother on the ethical question of relationship and responsibility of human to non-human animal. The research is significant as it could assist in the development of improved animal welfare strategies. This is due to the fact that human health benefits and the tie to human welfare and community livelihood are considered very important. The research recommends that, human beings should ensure they live up to their deserved moral responsibility and avoid exploitation in the treatment of non-human animals as permitted in societal processes.

1. Introduction

This piece of work is a contribution to the growing scholarly works in the multidisciplinary fields of animal study. It is motivated by the neglect of the 'welfare' of non-human animals which has reached unprecedented levels of exploitation, with grave

consequences for the environment, human health, and ethical identities. The traditional point of understanding is that God distinguished man from animals, and gave man control over animals to benefit him, but again God also gave man the moral guidelines and obligation to guard against cruelty or needless suffering by non human animals. *Animal rights* is the idea which some, or all, non human *animals* are entitled to the possession of their own existence and that their most basic interests such as the need to avoid suffering should be afforded the same consideration as similar interests of human beings (Taylor 8). On the other side is animal cruelty which is the abuse toward or neglect of non human animals. Some aspects of animal cruelty involve purposefully putting non human animals in situations to suffer, harm, scare, and terrorize them. The ethical arguments that exist in addressing animals' rights and welfare, absolutely have to do with addressing 'the right thing to do' for the animals themselves. It is worthy of note that, animal agriculture is not simply a theoretical crossing point between humans and other species, it is an economic endeavor, which functions primarily as a business. The Department of Health, Education and Welfare, Public Health Service, Washington, D.C in 1970 reports that, the key tenets of successful animal welfare initiatives as outlined in recent times emphasized the importance of engaging in establishing mutual benefits as a basis for collaboration (56). According to the literature, apart from the obvious benefits to the animals themselves, the supposed benefits for improving animal welfare vary. The importance of improving animal welfare offers the business benefit of mitigating the risk of non-human animals. It is discovered that improved animal welfare would make the animals safer and easier to handle. Besides the benefits received by the animals directly from improving their right

and welfare, there could be some wider community-based social benefits; this includes mitigating environmental despoliation or defacement and mitigating the indiscriminate and non-therapeutic use of antibiotics thereby driving the emerging anti-microbial resistance crisis.

This paper concludes with the recommendation which advocates for the advancement of "One

Welfare concept" with a view of attracting a close connection between animals and humans. This would go a long way to reduce the risks on human health in the aspects of reducing the incubation of pathogens found in high-confinement situations, along with respiratory problems and low-level antibiotic resistance.

Key Words: Bio-ethics, Discourse, Responsibility, Rights, Welfare

2. Conceptual Clarifications

Animals Rights: According to Encyclopaedia Britannica, Rights are universal; they are the birthright of every member of the family. No one earns or deserves the rights. Rights are inalienable and losing rights could mean that the beneficiary of such rights ceases to exist. Rights are indivisible, insoluble and inseparable. For Human rights, one cannot be denied a right because someone else decides that it is "less important" or "non-essential." Human rights are interdependent. They are not granted by any human authority such as a monarch, government, or secular or religious authority. Human rights are not the same as civil rights, such as those in the Nigeria's Constitutions, which are granted to individuals by virtue of their

citizen ship or residence in a particular country. Human rights are inherent and held as attributes of the human personality. They are both abstract and practical, holding up the inspiring vision of a free, just, and peaceful world with set minimum standards for how both individuals and institutions should treat people. These rights are expected to be applicable to all God's living creatures in totality. The assertion that animals do not have rights does not mean that researchers are free to use them without appropriate concern. In fact, animals are living things; they have evolved with us on this planet; they can feel pain and distress and because of our kinship with living things, animals have a value above and beyond anything that is not living. This value finds concrete expression in the concern for the obligation we have to minimize the pain and distress of animals.

Animals Welfare: According to Encyclopaedia Britannica, Welfare**,** is a concept of government in which the state or a well-established network of social institutions plays a key role in the protection and promotion of the economic and social well being of the citizens; it is based on the principles of equality of opportunity, equitable distribution of wealth, and public responsibility for those unable to avail themselves of the minimal provisions for a good life. The general term may cover a variety of forms of economic and social organization. In the area of animal welfare, a number of groups have been working for many years to safeguard and promote these obligations committed to the welfare of animals, as distinct from the concept of animal rights, and they have made a significant contribution to the well-being of animals especially those that are used for

research. This stems on the strength of the conviction that animal research has benefited and will continue to benefit human and animal health; they want to ensure that researched animals are treated as humanely as possible and are used only for important studies. Therefore, humans have an obligation to see that non animals are used for productive and meaningful goals. To provide society with an account of how they use animals.

Ethics- Ethics as also referred to as moral philosophy is that study or discipline which concerns itself with judgments of approval and disapproval, judgments as to the rightness or wrongness, goodness or badness, virtue or vice, desirability or wisdom of actions, dispositions, ends, objects, or states of affairs. Ethics concerns itself with establishing or recommending certain courses of action, ends, or ways of life as to be taken or pursued, either as right or as good or as virtuous or as wise, as over against others which are wrong, bad, vicious, or foolish (Dzurgba 54).

3. Ethical Issues Surrounding Animal Rights

Much of the current opposition to animal research is being fueled by a philosophical position known as “animal rights.” According to the viewpoint of Regan, animals have inherent legal and moral rights, just as humans do. This for Regan implies that, it is unethical to use animals as pets or for any other purpose, whether for food, clothing, recreation, or research (224). However, as to whether or not animals have “rights” depends on how the term is defined. If living things are ascribed a “right” to remain living, then animals would have rights. Although, many ethicists do not use

the term so broadly, they generally ascribe rights only to members of societies that are capable of applying mutually accepted ethical principles to specific situations (Cohen 551). For animals are not capable of forming or belonging to such societies. In this light, animals cannot be ascribed rights. The animal rights viewpoint also leads to some philosophically untenable conclusions. For instance, in its strongest form it implies that the lives of all animals, including humans, are equal. But the death of a human being is not equivalent to the death of a mouse. We do not commit an act equivalent to the murder of a human every time we eat meat. In the United States, there are many groups that are concerned with the use of animals in research. These groups have a wide variety of positions, and it is an oversimplification to speak of the "animal rights movement." But a fundamental distinction can be made between those who believe that animal research should continue, though with various modifications or restrictions, and those who believe that it should simply stop. They have worked assiduously and skillfully in legislatures, schools, and the media to pursue their cause, and in many cases their actions have met with a great deal of success. Animal research has become more costly and difficult, in part because of self-regulation by scientists but also because of externally imposed regulations. Some animal researchers have left the field, and young researchers have chosen not to enter it. Many members of the general public have the impression, based not on facts but on repeated allegation, that too much animal research is done. Some members of the animal rights movement pursue more extreme tactics, often with the implicit backing of more moderate elements (Horton 736). Researchers and their families have been

harassed and threatened. The scientific community can find no moral justification for these acts, although they are excused and even supported by leaders and leading organizations in the animal rights movement. Vandalism and harassment have slowed medical research that is dedicated to improving human well-being. Whatever these actions may be, it is also important to note that individuals who vandalize laboratories and harass researchers do not only break the law; they are also harm the people who would eventually have benefited from the research. They also deny hope to those who are presently living with incurable diseases.

4. Contemporary debates on Animal's Rights

One of the leading contributors to the non-human animal's rights debates is Peter Singer. Singer believes that Humans thought has contributed to animal cruelty and suffering. Underscoring this point, Singer laments concerning Thomas Aquinas doctrine of humanity's innate right to control the natural world as holding back progress in animal rights. However, Singer later announced that he had changed his views in part given the complexity of different views towards animals among different people (89).

Corroborating this view, Andrew Linzey expressed concern for animal rights. According to him; It is right for people to be critical and judgmental especially of the Christian tradition which has been amazingly callous towards animals. Christian theologians have been neglectful and dismissive of the cause of animals and many still are. That Christians and Jews have allowed their ancient texts such as Genesis to be read as license of tyranny over animals. While, all religious traditions have great resources for a very positive ethic

in relation to animals. Christian theology has some unique insights fundamental to the value of animals' life. With respect to the role of Christianity concerning animals' rights, contemporary philosopher Bernard Rollin states that "*dominion* does not entail or allow for abuse any more than does the dominion a parent enjoys over a child (21). He reiterates that the Sabbath requirement promulgated in the Ten Commandments "required that animals be granted a day of rest along with humans. Correlatively, the Bible forbids 'plowing with an ox and an ass together' (Deut. 22:10–11). -According to the rabbinical tradition, this prohibition stems from the hardship that an ass would suffer by being compelled to keep up with an ox, which is, of course, far more powerful. Similarly, one finds the prohibition against 'muzzling an ox when it treads out the grain' (Deut. 25:4–5), and even an environmental prohibition against destroying trees when besieging a city (Deut. 20:19–20). These ancient regulations, "best speak of an eloquent awareness of the status of animals as ends in themselves", a point also corroborated by Norm Phelps (20).

Animals Rights Abuse Arguments from the Christian Religious point of View

The relationship between Christianity and animal rights is complex, with different Christian communities conveying different conclusions about the status of animals. Many Christian philosophers and socio-political figures hold that Christians should follow the example of Jesus and treat animals in a way that expresses compassion and demonstrates the respectful stewardship of humanity over the non human animal and environment. One of such figures that fronts crusade for the prevention of cruelty against animals was William Wilberforce, a co-founder of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Oppenheimer 78). Andrew Linzey pointedly submitted that, it

would be wrong to see Christianity as an inherent enemy of animal rights since Christian theology, like all other religious traditions, has some unique insights to viewing animals' life as having fundamental value (97). Throughout history, there have been Christian thinkers who have raised tough ethical questions about the moral status of animals (25). Francis of Assisi is perhaps the most well-known example. Various church founders have recommended vegetarianism for ethical reasons, such as; Wesley's vegetarian views inspired a later generation to establish the American Vegetarian Society in 1850 Null, Christian denominations like Seventh Day Adventists have central vegetarian doctrines incorporated (13). According to Grant, the rise of Christianity it may be right to say has put an end to animal sacrifice as this practice is replaced by the grand and more precious sacrifice was offered by Jesus Christ, the prince of peace and that the Christian hope involves the idea of the Peace, which looks to a peaceful coexistence of animals such as wolves and lambs (41). The Bible offers for the concept of animal rights. This is seen in the first chapters of Genesis. On the one hand, Genesis 1:26-28 says that human beings are to have dominion over the non-human animals.

Peter Singer believes that this has been used by many Christian theologians throughout Church history to justify the idea that non-human animals exist only to serve or be of use to humans, which has sadly led to much use and abuse of animals at the hands of humanity (189). On the other hand, many Christian theologians, especially in recent times, are suggesting that a more accurate reading of Genesis 1:26-28 requires reading it in light of the teaching that all of God's creatures were initially given a plant based diet:

> Then God said, “I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground everything that has the breath of life in it. I give every green plant for food.” And it was so (Genesis 1:29-30).

This shows that, whatever 'dominion' means, it must be compatible with the idea of not eating any animals (Withrow-King 18). This suggests that 'dominion' be understood in terms of 'looking after', 'ruling over', 'being responsible for', or 'guiding'. Therefore, humanity's attitude towards non-human animals should be of caring responsibility, these include:

v. Care for any oxen and donkey they come across belonging to their enemies (Exodus 23:4-12). Because God rejoices in all his works, in everything he has created (Psalm 104:31).
vi. a "righteous man cares about his animal's health" (Proverbs 12:10).
vii. Jesus identifies sparrows as animals which are not valued by humans, but which God still knows and remembers (Matthew 10:29).
viii. Jesus comparing his love and care for Jerusalem and its inhabitants to the care a mother hen provides for her chicks (Matthew 23:37).

There are, however, passages which ignored the use of non-human animals in various ways, especially in religious sacrifices and as food. Specifically, meat-eating and other forms of animals use for human benefit received explicit approval by God after the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the garden of Eden to the end of the flood, as it states: “Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything” (Genesis 9:3). At every

stage of creation in Genesis account, God said was good, suggesting that God values everything He has created providing the basis for a very positive view of animals and their worth (45). In the New Testament, Jesus Christ existed not just as a theological figure in Christianity but also as an inspirational moral icon of Christian ethics. Jesus ate the Passover meal which included meat (Matthew 26:17-20). He associated with his followers who went fishing. Jesus rode on a donkey on entry into Jerusalem (Mark 11:7, Matthew 21:4-7, John 12:14,15). The teachings of Christianity ended animal sacrifice, as Christians believe Jesus died for all the sins of humanity and is often portrayed as the last sacrificial lamb in the New Testament (Demell 3). It is therefore incumbent on Christians to express kindness to the world's creatures they have a moral obligation to avoid causing unnecessary suffering to animals, while, meat eating in the context of nourishment is permitted. However, having respect for the rights of animals given that, in Christian terms, God deliberately created and proclaimed them all as good. Looking at the way non-humans are "reconciled to God in Jesus Christ and will be redeemed by God in the new creation" has accorded a caring duty for mankind.

5. Factors Responsible for Animal Rights Abuse

In many cases, animal rights abuse takes place due to ignorance and lack of interest. People need to be educated about the animals in their care. For instance, if a dog owner notices that his or her dog has sustained injury, he or she is morally and legally obliged to obtain veterinary care. Unfortunately, some people are reluctant or unwilling to spend time and money necessary to heal their sick or injured animals. Similarly, sometimes animals might go days or weeks without food because the owner has forgotten to feed

them. This type of neglectful circumstances make some animals eventually die of dehydration, malnutrition, untreated diseases, or other conditions. Some of the factors that lead to animals' abuse are as follows:

i. **Animal Exploitation:** This is the belief that we humans have the right to use animals in any way they wish, usually for monetary gains. Animal Exploitation is a form of animal brutality, especially when affects the animal's instinct or forces the animal into frightening situations. For instance, animals that are kept in circuses where they spend a longer part of their lives in tiny cages, zoos, aquatic theme parks, and other similar venues often exploit such animals in the name of entertainment, where they are forced into submission and denied socialization with other animals of their own species. Some of them are transported from city to city in trailers that lack climate control, and the use of barbaric devices to force performances without taking into account the many accidents that occur due to poor construction of exhibits.

ii. **Human Predation:** Human beings have unique set of skills and can dominate animals easily. When humans prey on animals, we take away their agency and reduce them to food on a table. Sometimes, we kill animals not even with the desire to eat them. Many cases of animal brutality come from factory farming, hunting, and fishing. People apply chemicals like gamaline 20 or Lindane inside water in order to weaken fish so that they can get big catch, but these chemicals do not only go a long way to poison the fish, the eggs and larvae which could produce more fish for a better future big catch, they also do a lot

of harm to other un targeted aquatic lives that could have been useful for manure etc. Besides, hunters get licenses without test to find out if they can shoot straight. Therefore, they maim some animals with non lethal shots such animals pass through excruciating deaths.

iii. **Use of Animal for Laboratory Experiment:** Animals in experiment facilities are exposed to all manner of chemicals and substances, many of which cause itching, burning, chronic pain, lost body parts, and other terrible consequences. The idea here is that, animal brutality that pervades laboratory experiment need to be discontinued. How would man feel if you are to spend entire life in hospital bed that has no mattress, blankets nor visitors. That is a close resemblance to what animal cruelty involved in laboratory testing.

iv. **Using Animals for Monetary Gain:** The denial of animals' rights often results from the desire to use animals for monetary gains. If the sale of animals' meat or by-products makes profit, then it is enough reasons to justify the slaughtering of innocent animals in order to provide for the family.

v. **Viewing Animals as Objects without Feelings and Emotions:** Nonhuman animals are often viewed as objects and are not responsive beings with emotions feelings and needs. They believe that human beings are the only animal on earth that can feel pain, fear, sadness, joy, despair, and hope. This is not true, for they experience pain when they injure themselves, joy when they play with a new toy, fear when they're confronted with a new experience and sadness when someone they love dies. When we view animals having no more

significance than a tool or device, then, animal cruelty can result without the feeling as though they're doing anything wrong.

vi. **Transfer of aggression:** One study found that, in a household where domestic violence occurs, the family pet might suffer the first few blows. And that, in homes where children were abused, a larger number of them also manifest evidence of animal brutality. There's a consistent and disturbing link between animal abuse and the abuse of fellow human beings.

vii. **Animal brutality by omission and commission:** An act of animal brutality by omission generally refers to a situation where the person responsible for the abuse withholds something the animal needs: like food, water, shelter, access to veterinary care. Meanwhile, animal cruelty by commission involves adding something negative to the animal's life, whether it's a chemical applied in an animal testing lab or a beating by a cruel human being. The animals that most suffer cruelty than others include but not limited to the followings: Companion Animals like dogs, cats, birds, rabbits etc. Livestock animals that are bred to provide meat, eggs, and milk, chickens, cows and other livestock spend their entire lives in tiny cages that prevent them from moving in any direction, de-beaking (beak cutting), dehorning, castration without anesthetic. They live in their own waste, diseases can proliferate quickly, and farm workers sometimes beat the animals anyhow. Sea life like fish and other animals in oceans for instance, Sharks are relieved of their fins for shark fin soup, larger sea creatures are stabbed and left to die in the ocean where they are left. Rodents,

such as rats and mice, endure some of the most horrific acts of animal cruelty both as so-called pests and as subjects of animal testing. Bullfighting, cockfighting, dog fighting, or fighting, these are highly organized events that take place in every corner of the world. Horse slaughter is a startling example of animal brutality. When they're taken into the slaughterhouse, they can sense the danger and become terrified. Horses are extremely athletic. They can rear, buck, kick, and spin. Consequently, they can't be easily astounded prior to slaughter, and the humans have to protect themselves from hooves and teeth over humanely euthanizing the animals, which makes their last few hours of life torturous (Rolling 117).

viii. **Bush Burning and Tree Cuttings:** Indiscriminate bush burning, bush harvesting and cutting down of trees by human beings for various can render the animals homeless as their grass beds and foods are destroyed. The heat arising from fire flames have serious negative damaging effects on the medium size lives like larvae. Their holes are heated as grasses and trees lost their shades. Humans hunt and prey on any of the animals they see around deploying deadly weapons against them as if they are permanent enemies.

6. The Disadvantages of Animals Rights Abuse

i. **Chemical poisoning:** As stated from the foregoing, when people apply chemicals like gamaline 20 or Lindane inside water in order to weaken fish so that they can get big catch, but these chemicals do not only go a long way to poison the fish, the eggs and larvae which could produce more fish for a better

future big catch, they also do a lot of harm to other un targeted aquatic lives that could have been useful for manure etc. The application of deadly substances for birds and rodents to eat and die with a view to deter them from disturbances in the house or at farm is another issue. In many instances, such animals are later consumed by the same human beings. These chemicals constitutes potential damages to the human body, manifested in liver damage, kidney damage and destruction of unsuspecting and untargeted animals which could in turn be ignorantly eaten by humans.

ii. **Outbreak of Complex Diseases:** Unfortunately, many cases of animal hoarding involve homes so crammed with animals that the owner doesn't even realize when one of them has died. The odors of feces and urine may cover up the smell of decomposition, leading to horrific circumstances of outbreak of spread of disease like antrax, intestinal worms, Bovine tuberculosis and other disease germ spread among both the human and the nonhuman animals.

7. Ethical Role of Mankind in the Prevention of Animals Rights Abuse

viii. Advocate and support legislation that promotes kindness to animals**.** Strong animal welfare laws and harsh penalties will lead to fewer cruelty cases.

ix. Be an example of kindness to animals. Foster those that have suffered abandonment. Sadly, many pet animals are relinquished to shelters for various reasons. Foster homes help these animals to recover and prepare them to move onto a new permanent loving home.

x. Intervene if you witness animal rights abuse or neglect. Do your best to stop someone from mistreating an animal without putting yourself in danger.

xi. Report animal abuse or neglect to the police or other authorities so as to prevent further abuse.

xii. Teach your children to have respect for animals and treat them with love and consideration. Help them to grow up to become the next generation of advocates for animals rights.

xiii. Bear in mind also that neglect of animals can be closely linked to domestic violence. Animal abuse and domestic abuse are often closely connected. By reporting suspicions, you may also be helping both the animal in need and the family concerned.

xiv. Create awareness to people around you about the issue to help them understand that animals have a right to live without fear or pain, and we have a responsibility to step in if their rights are not respected.

8. Conclusion

Animals are sentient creatures that deserve our respect and protection. They are not aggressive toward human beings unless they are threatened, and human beings have stolen much of their wildlife space to our own advantage and added to their suffering.

Animal rights abuse can be real pervasive, because people see animals as less valuable than humans and atrocities committed against animals have continued to happen over and over. Though it happens to different types of animals in the various corners of the world,

it is also unnecessary and preventable. Although, people clearly want the benefits that derive from animal research, they also want animals to be well-treated to undergo a minimum of pain and distress.

These desires result from our values, from the importance we ascribe to both human and animal life. But decisions about the use of animals should be based both on reason and values. It makes no sense to sacrifice future human health and well-being by not using animals in research today.

In fact, it would be immoral and selfish not to use animals in research today, given the harm that could accrue to future generations if such research were halted. Many scientific, medical, and patient groups have come out strongly in favor of humanely conducted animal research. We owe our good health to past investigators and the animals they studied. As we decide on the future of animal research, we should also keep in mind the future generations who will look back at us and ask if we acted wisely.

NOTES

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