

Singer, “All animals are equal”

Animal liberation--extending the basic principles of equality to other species, just as other liberation movements extended the the basic principle of equality to other sexes, races, etc...

Objection: Is Singer just nuts? Does he want my dog to have the right to vote and freedom of speech? Liberation movements involving people make sense, animals, not so much.

- Basic principle of equality does not require equal rights or equal treatment.
 - Equality doesn't demand that men have a right to an abortion, nor does it demand that dogs have the right to vote.

Clarifying equality

Singer's strategy is to clarify what we mean by equality by clarifying why and on what grounds we oppose racism and sexism.

Maybe we oppose it because all people are equal. But on the face of it, that's not true. We're unequal in size, shape, intelligence, virtue, etc...The demand for equality is unjustified if it's supposed to be based on our actual equality, because we're not in fact equal.

So maybe individuals aren't actually equal, but different races and sexes are. What's wrong with racism and sexism is that it treats people differently based on factors (race, sex) that don't

actually correspond to meaningful differences between persons.

Okay, so racism and sexism may be wrong, but we can still treat people unequally based on their actual differences in aptitude and capacities. So, perhaps, treating smart people better than the not-so-smart people is justifiable. So instead of making women or minorities second-class citizens, we make stupid people second-class citizens. This still seems to violate a basic principle of equality.

Also, it might turn out that there are differences in capacities and abilities that fall along racial or gender lines. This is an empirical question that has not been definitively answered, and if it turns out that some race or gender is, on the whole, inferior in some respect, then perhaps racism or sexism is justified.

In short, relying on a claim of some kind of actual equality between persons leaves open the possibility that racism and sexism are justified (pending empirical investigation/confirmation), and that other kinds of inegalitarian arrangements (e.g., based on intelligence) are justified. This, though, is counterintuitive, so we need another interpretation of equality.

Equal Consideration

Equality is “not a simple assertion of fact,” as the above arguments assume. It is a moral ideal. The basic principle of equality doesn’t say that all people are equal with respect to some aptitude or capacity or feature they have. It says all

people should have their interests considered equally.

Descriptive equality vs. prescriptive equality.

- One describes some actual equality between persons
- One prescribes how we should treat people.
- There's no compelling reason to think the second relies importantly on the first.

Equal Consideration--The interests of every being affected by an action are to be taken into account and given the same weight as the like interests of any other being. In Bentham's words: "Each to count for one and none for more than one."

What the basic principle of equality says is that if two beings have the same interests, those interests ought to be considered equally. Racists and sexists fail to treat the interests of all equally. That's what's wrong with it.

What gives something its right to have its interests considered equally? The capacity to suffer. Why? Because a capacity to suffer is necessary in order to have interests at all. Rocks have no interests we must consider. Beings that suffer do.

Minimally, any being that can suffer has an interest in not suffering, and the principle of equality requires that we count that interest, and its suffering, equally.

Speciesism

Just as the racist violates the principle of equality by favoring

the interests of his own race over the equal or greater interests of other races, a speciesist violates the principle of equality by favoring the interests of his own species over the equal or greater interests of other species.

Killing animals to eat--speciesist

Raising animals in factory farms to be eaten--speciesist

Experimenting on animals--speciesist

A test for detecting speciesism.

Consider the act in question--eating a cow, raising pigs for food, experimenting on a mouse, etc...now ask yourself whether you would be prepared to do the same thing to a person who had roughly the same capacities and abilities as the animal in question. If the answer is 'no', then you're being a speciesist, since you've tacitly admitted to favoring the interests of your own species despite the fact that you recognize that the animal has the same interests. Equality demands that count the interests equally. Each for one, none for more than one. So either be prepared to experiment on children and/or severely handicapped people, or stop experimenting on animals.

Another test for speciesism:

. . . we respect the interests of men and give them priority over dogs not insofar as they are rational, but because rationality is the human norm. We say it is unfair to exploit the deficiencies of the imbecile who falls short of the norm, just as it would be unfair, and not just ordinarily dishonest, to steal from a blind man. If we do not think in this way about dogs, it is because we do not see the irrationality of the dog as a deficiency or a handicap, but as normal for the species. The characteristics, therefore, that distinguish the normal man from the normal dog make it intelligible for us to talk of other men having interests and capacities, and therefore claims, of precisely the same kind as we make on our own behalf. But although these characteristics may provide the point of the distinction between men and other species, they are not in fact the qualifying conditions for membership, to the distinguishing criteria of the class of morally considerable persons; and this is precisely because a man does not become a member of a different species, with its own standards of normality, by reason of not possessing these characteristics.

Assume we've proven that the average, or normal, I.Q. of whites is higher than that of blacks. Now substitute 'white' for 'men' and 'black' for 'dog' and 'high I.Q.' for 'rationality' and 'dumb whites' for 'imbeciles' and 'species' for 'race' in the passage above.

. . . we respect the interests of whites and give them priority over blacks not insofar as they have a high I.Q., but because a high I.Q. is the white norm. We say it is unfair to exploit the deficiencies of the dumb whites who falls short of the norm, just as it would be unfair, and not just ordinarily dishonest, to steal from a blind man. If we do not think in this way about blacks, it is because we do not see the irrationality of blacks as a deficiency or a handicap, but as normal for the race, The characteristics, therefore, that distinguish the normal white from the normal black make it intelligible for us to talk of other races having interests and capacities, and therefore claims, of precisely the same kind as we make on our own behalf. But although these characteristics may provide the point of the distinction between whites and other races, they are not in fact the qualifying conditions for membership, to the distinguishing criteria of the class of morally considerable persons; and this is precisely because a white man does not become a member of a different race, with its own standards of normality, by reason of not possessing these characteristics.

The second version is outrageous, but not (just) because we relied on a false assumption. It would be outrageous even if true. It is so because it defends an arbitrary distinction between races. Blacks and whites with equal interests should get equal consideration. If it seems absurd when race is at issue, it should seem absurd when species is the issue too.