



From Animals' Right to Applied Ethic

Do Direito dos Animais à Ética Aplicada

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**Léo Peruzzo Jr. – The animal ethics deal with the interest in nature as a whole.
What do you consider to be the main limits of the traditional ethics?**

Peter Singer – Originally, the ethics of small tribes and societies was concerned with what one can do to members of one's own group. There were no ethical constraints on what one could do to others. Even in the ethics of the Old Testament, that is clear from the way in which God commands the Israelites to slaughter the men, women and children of other groups. Gradually the circle of ethics expanded to include larger groups, and now, what we might call "traditional ethics" includes all human beings. Nevertheless, it remains limited to human beings. There is no justification for such a limit. Just as we have moved beyond the bounds of social groups, races and nations, so we ought to move beyond the boundary of species, to include all sentient beings.

Léo Peruzzo Jr. – What are the current approaches that originated the perspective that the animals do not have rights? What can we consider as “human nature”? Why should the animals have the same rights as humans?

Peter Singer – My previous answer deals with the first part of this question – as early ethics did not even attribute rights to all human beings, it was further still from attributing them to animals. I have no brief answer to the second part of the question, what we consider to be human nature, and in any case it is better to take it, not as an ethical question, but as an empirical one. As for the third part of the question: I do not think animals should have the same rights as normal, mature human beings. They should not, for instance, have the right to vote. And in general, I do not think that we should base our moral views on conceptions of rights. Rights are, in my view, derivative from interests, which are more basic. But when animals have interests similar to humans, such as an interest in not feeling pain, we should recognize that there is no justification for failing to give as much consideration to the pain of an animal as we would give to the similar pain of a human. To do otherwise would be speciesism – that is, to discriminate on the basis of species, which in itself is no more defensible than discrimination on the basis of race.

Léo Peruzzo Jr. – What are the main obstacles to accepting the idea of animal ethics in the contemporary society?

Peter Singer – The main obstacle is that it is convenient for us to treat animals as if they had no moral claims upon us. We use them in many different ways – for entertainment, as tools for research, and as food, to name just three. Taking the interests of animals seriously would threaten our ability to use animals in these ways, and so we find excuses and rationalizations to continue our present practices. These excuses are elevated in ideologies by religious institutions and other bodies that defend the *status quo*. For example, the Jewish and Christian Bible says that God made man “in his own image”. This myth enhances our

sense of importance, and by comparison, diminishes the importance we give to animals.

Léo Peruzzo Jr. – What does the future hold for the relation between human beings and animals?

Peter Singer – Over the last 40 years, we have begun to turn the tide of human oppression of animals that goes back thousands of years. I hope that we will continue to make progress in this direction, and that in the future relations between humans and animals will be better than they are now.

Léo Peruzzo Jr. – According to your perspective, what is the path to the contemporary philosophy?

Peter Singer – The path to contemporary philosophy lies in critical thinking about the way we live, and what we take to be right and wrong.

Léo Peruzzo Jr. – Do you consider that the States and the contemporary policy in the Western society have projects regarding nature protection, specially animal protection?

Peter Singer – There have, as I said in answer to question 4, been significant improvements in some countries — especially in the European Union, where some of the worst forms of confinement of factory farm animals have been made illegal. In the U.S. and several other countries there has also been improvement. But there is still a long way to go.