

Share the World; Share Respect

How would any of us feel if we woke up one day to find our house completely destroyed, our family lost, or our freedom taken away by another species that thinks it is superior to us? This is the reality for countless animals around the world because of us. Animals, like us, live in this world and share similar feelings as us. As human society grows and expands, animals are losing more and more of their world because humans try to show their superiority. Humans must realize that all animals deserve to be treated well because they have both interests, meaning their need to experience well-being, and rights, meaning moral treatment and freedom from harm, making their treatment not only important for kindness but also for justice.

Humans should treat animals well because the latter have rights as living beings. We coexist and share the world; therefore, we have the same rights to life and freedom. Not only do the two beings share the world, but they also both display similar behaviors, such as valuing family, protecting the young, and showing signs of sadness or empathy. University of Vienna cognitive biologist W. Tecumseh Fitch once said that, “And from a modern biological point of view, we really need to turn these ideas on their head and recognize a very simple biological fact: It’s a truism, but people are animals, too” (Michel par. 3). Animals in the wild, for instance, choose what they do with their lives, where they go, and what they eat. In this manner, animals and humans are similar in expressing their autonomy. According to Marc Wilcox, a horse “through having her current desires satisfied for her by the ranger, she has her opportunity to form and pursue different, more fine-grained desires, obstructed” (11). In this quote, he emphasizes how humans, even with noble intentions, can still limit animals from being natural by decreasing their chance at exercising their autonomy through everyday actions like social bonding. Very few people would argue that humans do not have

inalienable rights to freedom and self-determination, and with humans and animals being members of the same world, they share these inalienable rights to freedom and self-determination. Humans, furthermore, impact the natural world, which in turn impacts animals; therefore, if humans have a positive impact on the natural world, then humans respect animals' rights by providing pristine living conditions. As Michael Hutchins and Christen Wemmer say, "The primary goal of the environmental/conservation ethic is to preserve naturally occurring biological diversity... A thing is right if it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends to do otherwise" (3). This means that protecting ecosystems, not just individual animals, is important to honor the rights of the animals, since their health depends on the condition of the habitat they live in. One's environment affects one's physical and mental health; therefore, a clean and stress-free environment respects animals' rights and gives them confidence. By understanding the rights and interests of animals and treating them with justice, humans can start to make up for the damage done and respect all living beings.

In addition to rights, animals, like humans, have familial and social units. Humans or animals, we are all part of a family. Just as human parents take care of their children, animal parents care for their offspring, providing emotional and material support. Siblings are the initial childhood playmates, teaching their brothers and sisters how to share or how to play a game. For example, African lion cubs "play, wrestle, and nap together," while red fox kits "play fight from an early age" (Horton par. 2). These behaviors can show how animals also bond with their siblings. Humans or animals, all youth develop skills in this manner, demonstrating that humans and animals have shared interests in raising their young to be productive members of the family as well as the larger society. These lessons learned in childhood are used as animals and humans mature and begin having more contact with others outside of the family. Food interests and play, for example, grow more varied as one's social

circles expand, and each animal is unique and has their own sets of interests. A penguin's interest will differ from a hippo's interest, just as a nomad's interests will differ from an urban dweller's interests. Penguins "dive up to 1,755 feet for food in water" (Shiffer par. 18), while "hippos spend up to 16 hours a day submerged in water" (14). Nomads "move every few days or weeks to continually find plants and animals to eat" (UW-La Crosse par. 1), while urban dwellers live a life with "a harmonious blend of convenience, efficiency, and style" (FasterCapital 8). Interests, moreover, allow animals to have a meaningful life, because they get to spend time doing what they want to do, and this needs to be respected by humans. Following one's interests, whether an animal or a human, develops society overall, as it allows a species to grow and evolve over time by allowing one the independence of self-discovery.

Due to the benefits animals have provided us, humans have a responsibility to treat animals with respect. When humans domesticated animals, human evolution advanced exponentially. Hunting, for instance, improved when dogs joined hunting parties, and food supplies were more reliable when chickens were raised by humans. Antonia Čirjak stated, "Once we started domesticating animals and using them for hunting and farming, everything changed. Our societies became permanent and based around one place... [It] created a food supply humans could depend upon, and this led to a larger population density" (par. 3). This quote emphasizes how domestication did not only help us with hunting, but has reshaped human civilization overall. Humans and animals have many similarities: they have family bonds, they have feelings and emotions, and they have a survival instinct. We, therefore, should treat animals with dignity. The fact that they also have these traits like humans shows they deserve our respect. It proves that animals are not just tools for human use but have significance of their own. Once humans see that they are just like us, it would be morally right to show the same compassion we would for ourselves. Household pets, when they are

loved and cared for by their owners, have excellent lives and are treated respectfully.

However, if a pet falls out of favor with its owner, the pet may be abandoned and forced to fend for itself. An excellent starting point, therefore, would be providing safer and more plentiful animal shelters in urban areas. Since animals can suffer like some humans, we should protect them and treat them better, just like we do for other humans. Many family pets are discarded, and these pets end up living on the streets. Getting these animals off the streets and into clean, safe environments would demonstrate our respect for their lives. In addition, “Male chicks of these varieties are ‘useless’ because they put on meat slowly and in small quantities... In Germany, the number of killed chicks is estimated at 45 million per year” (Busse par. 2). The quote explains why corporate farms, where chickens can be crammed into windowless buildings with no room for any movement, need to be eradicated. These chickens never see the sun, never breathe fresh air, yet we expect them to give their lives for our sustenance. Knowing we share similarities, imagine if humans were treated in this manner. Outcries would ring out, but there is little outcry and even less done for animals. Despite animal activists, through protests and other activities, fighting hard, the unfair treatment of animals still continues. Some small changes might happen, like a ban on zoos, but it does not stop the bigger problem. Furthermore, caring for animals’ rights and interests means taking care of the planet, for without a clean environment, animals will suffer physically and emotionally. When animals suffer, humans suffer: we are all interconnected. We are responsible for these problems; thus, we are responsible for the solutions. Our actions, such as deforestation or urban expansion, have destroyed animal habitats. Just like Maureen Simba says, “Human actions are the number one cause of wildlife population decline” (par. 37). Humans know these problems and conditions exist for animals, but not enough has been done to solve or even assuage these situations by focusing on their interests and rights.

Some people might argue that animals do not have any interests beyond basic survival necessities, such as eating and reproducing. Unlike humans, they appear less complex by seemingly not having any complex thoughts or reflections. Considering their actions are mostly instincts, critics claim that animals have fewer moral rights and interests than humans. According to Carl Cohen and Tom Regan, “Animals cannot be the bearers of rights because the concept of right is essentially human; it is rooted in the human moral world and has force and applicability only within that world” (Linder par. 32). In the quote, the idea of rights being only for humans because it is only in the human world that these rights have power is an important distinction. Animals may be given rights by humans, but the animals cannot advocate for their rights or understand their rights because they lack the cognitive ability, and more importantly, animals operate outside of the human realm. These factors taken together illustrate that animals do not have the same rights as humans.

While some claim that animals do not have the same rights as humans because they do not operate fully in the human world, animals contain the same emotions and emotional attachments as humans. For example, animals such as elephants mourn their dead just as humans do. Becky Millar states, “In 1999, an elderly female elephant at an Indian zoo reportedly died of grief after a young elephant she had befriended died during childbirth” (Fox-Skelley par. 8). The mourning by pachyderms demonstrates a deeper interest in the lives of their family members—interests, therefore, go beyond mere survival. While the opposing argument seems to have merit on the surface, a deeper analysis shows that humans and animals do contain far greater similarities, and as such, humans should treat animals with the same respect as they would treat a fellow human.

Animals deserve to be treated with respect because they have the same amount of rights and interests as humans, including having rights to autonomy and habitat, having family bonds and emotions, and the dependence between one another. We have a

responsibility to protect them, not only because it is morally correct, but because we share this world. Treating animals with respect ultimately helps both of our futures.

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