

Emotions cause people to say animals suffer just like humans do

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Avoiding meat improves health, stops animals' 'pain without a purpose'



Animals have rights, too. Just like black people.

You may not have known this, but the turkeys are perturbed, and our bovine world companions are sizzling with anger. Their quest for equal civil rights is entwined with that of our differently colored neighbors. Our non-human companions are fed up.

You didn't know this?

Well, you missed out, then. A few weeks ago, during the unopposed Rally on the Capitol (which was part of the jubilant Martin Luther King Jr. celebrations), I received a flier from the Students for Animal Rights. This flier revealed the horrendous maltreatment of our differently gened friends.

I would have guessed the quest to stop eating animals was separate and distinct from the quest for equal civil rights for humans, but apparently the theme of compassion runs through both. The chicken, the turkey and the cow experience suffering at our hands. Their blood cries for vengeance in the pits of our stomachs.

Uh, yeah.

Among other ridiculous notions, the flier implies that chickens, who have been raised and kept in inhumane conditions, long to see the sunlight and to feel the dirt between their toes on a bright summer day. Cows and humans experience the same emotional loss when they are separated from their offspring.

This is serious over-anthropomorphism. Turkeys, cows, fish — these creatures have not read Walden and can not possibly yearn for the same "best of all possible worlds" that we think of when we talk about dirt between the toes. This romanticism is produced by the human mind.

It is equally absurd to imply that a cow can suffer for loss of a calf the same way that a human suffers for loss of a child. Sure, we can say our feeling of loss is instinctual, and we may share it with

the bovine among us. But without any real evidence, how can we know?

The flier-writer tries to sell his or her case with its quotations. One quotation is from Peter Singer, who is a strong proponent for veganism. However, he also is a strong proponent for infanticide in certain cases.

He is compelled by compassion in either case, true, but the Students for Animal Rights group uses a blanket statement and not a complex moral ideology to reach its conclusions. Students for Animal Rights chooses the quotations of Singer supporting its cause without addressing the larger implications of his thinking.

The flier and Students for Animal Rights' fundamental problem is that the group espouses a position that ultimately doesn't make sense.

Ethics and morality are systems based on human thinking — often human rationality. When our morals and ethics lead us to conclusions about the real world that don't make sense, our reaction should not be compliance.

Animal rights activists claim compassionate treatment of animals is the logical conclusion of the thinking compelling us to advocate equal

human rights. But, as humans, we control the world in so many ways through artificial means, it seems that meat factories are only a logical conclusion of that, too.

Any animal rights activist not only must renounce meat and other animal products, but also the society that leads to their production, for example, Western civilization.

Most animal rights activists don't do this. They spout off their tripe from their academic ivory towers and show their hypocrisy. Animal rights activists' views don't jive with the society they live in; they don't make sense. Doesn't this indicate that something is wrong with their ethics?

Besides, animals eating other animals is not a distinctly human invention. If we were to take the lead of our carnivorous animal friends and hunt animals that are free to flee, would it still be wrong to eat them? Or would our attacks be the equivalent of terrorism, and thus inhumane?

If it would be wrong for us to eat animals under any circumstances, then should we let other animals eat other animals, too? We don't stand neutral in respect to terrorism among humans, do we?

Further, what about the suffering of animals we cause by expanding our communities? Think of all the worms that are dis-



placed every time we dig for the foundation of a new building, or pave a new parking lot. Indeed, every action that we take that is good for society is bad for some number of our non-human companions.

It's a matter of where to draw the lines. Is it morally wrong to create food factories, but morally right to plow over acres of prairie-dog homes for our own crops? Is it wrong to abuse dolphins, cows, chickens, fish, earthworms and microbes? Lines are necessary in this discussion. Can we draw these lines?

The Students for Animal Rights takes a reckless position and its results are completely illogical, almost flippant. It embraces an emotional justification for non-intuitive actions. It renders itself unable to outline logically appropriate behavior and to stop the absurd extension of its principles to society-stopping conclusions.

Further, they do a disservice to other, more rational pursuits for civil rights by minorities when they attach their agenda to Martin Luther King Jr.'s as a "logical extension." It is not a logical extension — it isn't even the same idea.



I'm probably the most cynical bastard I know.

I want a clean environment, but I'm not a stereotypical tree-hugger, willing to sacrifice all progress for the sake of some foliage.

I have a dog back home, but I'll never be one of those old ladies who keeps 27 cats because she can't bear to see a stray. And if I'm ever starving in the middle of a frozen wilderness, with nothing around but me and a deer, I can say without hesitation that I'll be feasting on venison.

My support for reducing the harms we inflict

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betes, and gallstones are lower" (FDA Consumer, October 1995).

Most of the vegetarians I've met have lost weight and have more energy since they stopped eating meat. Although eating vegetarian won't guarantee a healthy diet, it's certainly a good start. And, of course, you don't have to quit cold turkey (pun intended) like I did. Some people start with one meatless meal per day and then gradually eat two or more a day until they're completely meat-free.

Even in beef-infested Lincoln, with a little work, good vegetarian food can be found. It's certainly worth the effort for the sake of better health.

Ethics

St. Thomas Aquinas and Immanuel Kant embody the traditional philosophical view of animals. This view is that animals are a mere resource to be exploited for man's use. Therefore, we have no duties towards them whatsoever. Some modern philosophers, such as Tom Regan and Peter Singer, believe animals have an inherent value. They believe using animals in science, agriculture and hunting should be abolished.

The debate is certainly interesting and worth more attention, but I don't have the space to go into it here. Instead, my support for animal rights stems from the simple fact that animals feel pain.

I think it a defensible proposition that the infliction of pain without a purpose is wrong, and animals suffer in many needless ways because of our selfishness.

The meat we eat and the leather we wear does not come from an idyllic, farm-like creature from "Charlotte's Web."

James Rachels, in "Elements of Moral Philosophy," describes the living conditions of a veal calf as one example. The calves "spend

their lives in pens too small to allow them to turn around or even to lie down comfortably," because exercise toughens the meat and additional space is expensive. The calves cannot perform natural functions like grooming themselves or suckling from their mothers.

They're fed a diet deficient in iron and roughage (which means they cannot form a cud to chew) and they are not given any straw

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for bedding — they might eat it, again affecting the quality of the meat. "As terrifying as the process of slaughter is, for them it may actually be a merciful release," Rachels says.

The terrible thing is that all of this suffering inflicted on animals is unnecessary. We have alternatives to meat, animal clothing and animal research in cosmetic testing.

Even from a utilitarian perspective, I could not justify the lifelong suffering of a sentient creature for the transitory pleasure some jerk feels downing a Big Mac. The same principals that would evoke outrage in seeing two teenagers stomp a puppy to death on the curb should evoke anger in seeing a pig butchered. Both are unnecessary, even if one animal is cuter than the other.

Respecting animals doesn't mean we're perfect. I support the use of animals in medical research because it provides real benefits to suffering people. I still eat eggs and cheese because I don't have the money or the skill to be vegan in a place like Nebraska. In an imperfect world, all we can do is the best we can with what we have.

But give the animals the benefit of the doubt. It won't hurt you one bit, and it'll help them tremendously.

animals doesn't stem from a bleeding heart or from the theoretical constructions of the learned from on high. It stems from common sense.

There are two main reasons to respect animal rights: health and ethics.

Health

"The new fitness fad," shouts the magazine headline.

Americans seem to be trying anything and everything to improve their health. Some attend expensive fitness centers, while others scrupulously cut fat and sugar out of their diets. For millions of Americans, however, a simple and effective way to eat healthier is by becoming a vegetarian. The strictest of vegetarians (vegans) do not eat any foods containing animal products. Others make exceptions for eggs and milk.

Medical research clearly shows that eating vegetarian is a good way to improve your health. Johanna Dwyer, a registered dietitian at New England Medical Center Hospital, said, "Vegetarians are at lesser risk for obesity, atonic [reduced muscle tone] constipation, lung cancer and alcoholism. Evidence is good that risks for hypertension, coronary heart disease, type II dia-

Jacob Glazeski is a senior music and math major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

Jeremy Patrick is a first-year law student and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.