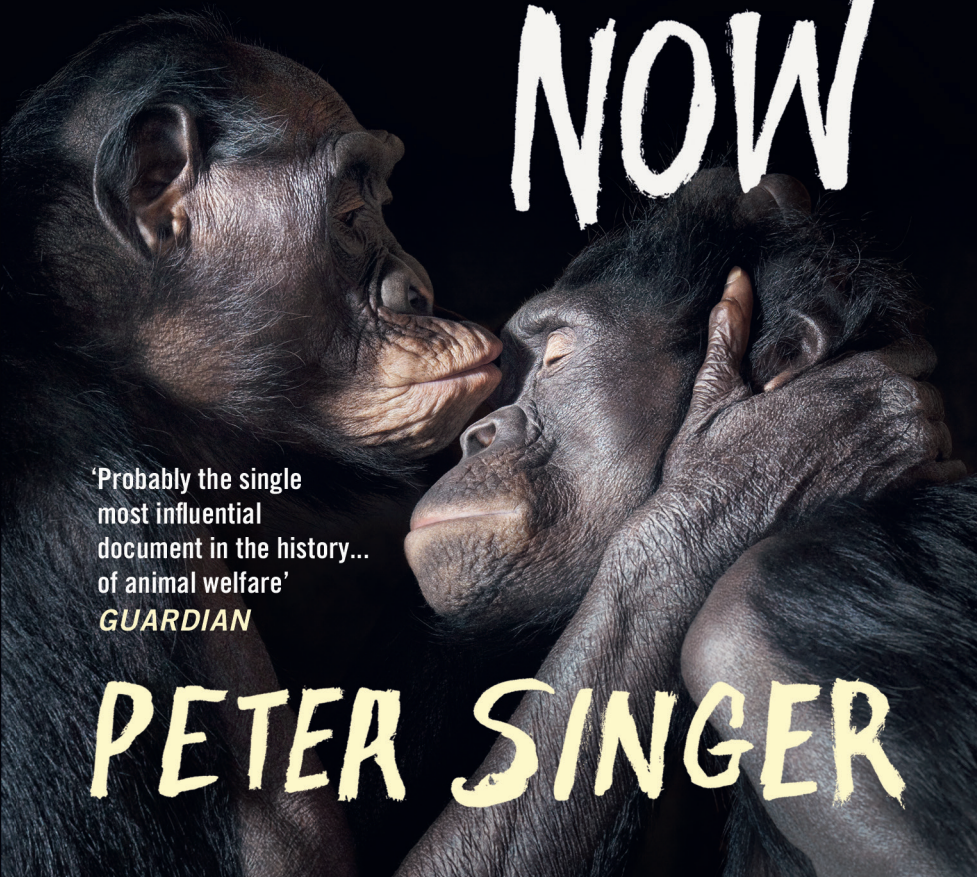
WITH A FOREWORD BY YUVAL NOAH HARARI

'The book that had the most impact on me'
JANE GOODALL

ANIMAL LIBERATION NOW



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GUARDIAN

PETER SINGER

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"In its first incarnation, *Animal Liberation* became the indispensable foundational text for the movement whose name it bore. In its new, updated, and wholly rewritten form, *Animal Liberation Now* provides not only a survey—sober, authoritative, and chilling—of what goes on today in the factory farms and research laboratories of the world, but also a guide, written with the honesty and philosophical depth characteristic of all of Peter Singer's work, through the complexities of the modern debate on animal rights."

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—Dale Jamieson, director, Center for Environmental
and Animal Protection, New York University

"Peter Singer has helped transform our sense of what we owe to others, by showing us that the others encompass all sentient beings. As a philosopher, I rejoice at the appearance of *Animal Liberation Now* and thank Singer for bringing honor upon our subject through his life and work."

—Mark Johnston, Henry Putnam University
Professor of Philosophy, Princeton University

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PETER SINGER

Peter Singer has been called the most influential philosopher alive. He is professor of bioethics at Princeton University and has published numerous books, including *The Life You Can Save* (2009), *The Most Good You Can Do* (2015) and *Ethics in the Real World* (2016).

He became well known internationally after the publication of *Animal Liberation* in 1975 and has been a leading thinker and campaigner in the field of animal rights ever since. *Animal Liberation* was included in *TIME Magazine*'s list of 100 Best Non-fiction Books Published Since 1923.

In 2012 Singer was made a Companion of the Order of Australia, his country's highest civilian honour, and in 2021 he was awarded the Berggruen Prize for Philosophy and Culture.

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Animal Liberation Now

The Definitive Classic Renewed

WITH A FOREWORD BY
Yuval Noah Harari

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To Richard and Mary, and Ros and Stan, for enlightening
me about our treatment of animals;
to Renata for sharing our decision to stop eating animals, and for
our wonderful journey together; and to the many, many good people
striving to bring about a better world for all sentient beings.

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Penguin
Random House
UK

First published in Vintage in 2024
This edition first published in Great Britain by The Bodley Head in 2023

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Printed and bound in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, Elcograf S.p.A.

The authorised representative in the EEA is Penguin Random House Ireland,
Morrison Chambers, 32 Nassau Street, Dublin D02 YH68

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 9781529925548

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INTRODUCTION

Yuval Noah Harari

ANIMALS ARE THE MAIN VICTIMS OF HISTORY, AND THE TREATment of domesticated animals in industrial farms is perhaps the worst crime in history. These statements would have sounded ludicrous back in 1975, when Peter Singer first published *Animal Liberation*. Today, thanks in no small part to the impact of this seminal book, increasing numbers of people accept these ideas as reasonable, or at least debatable.

In the decades since the publication of *Animal Liberation*, scientists have increasingly turned their attention to the study of animal cognition, animal behavior, and human-animal relations. What they have discovered has largely confirmed Singer's main insights: The human march of progress is strewn with dead animals. Already tens of thousands of years ago, our Stone Age ancestors were responsible for a series of ecological disasters. When the first humans reached Australia about 45,000 years ago, they quickly drove to extinction 90 percent of its large animals. This was the first significant impact *Homo sapiens* had on the ecosystem. It was not the last.

About 15,000 years ago humans colonized America, wiping out in the process about 75 percent of its large mammals. Numerous other species disappeared from Africa, from Eurasia, and from the myriad islands around their coasts. The archaeological

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record of country after country tells the same sad story. The tragedy opens with a scene showing a rich and varied population of large animals, without any trace of *Homo sapiens*. In scene two, Sapiens appear, evidenced by a fossilized bone, a spear point, or perhaps a campfire. Scene three quickly follows, in which men and women occupy center stage and most large animals, along with many smaller ones, are gone. Altogether, Sapiens drove to extinction about 50 percent of all the large terrestrial mammals of the planet *before* they planted the first wheatfield, shaped the first metal tool, wrote the first text, or struck the first coin.

The next major landmark in human-animal relations was the Agricultural Revolution. It involved the appearance of a completely new life-form on earth: domesticated animals. Initially it seemed to be of minor importance, as humans managed to domesticate less than twenty species of mammals and birds, compared to countless thousands of species that remained "wild." Yet with the passing of the centuries, this novel life-form became dominant. Today more than 90 percent of all large animals are domesticated. Consider the chicken, for example. Ten thousand years ago it was a rare bird confined to small niches in South Asia. Today billions of chickens live on almost every continent and island, bar Antarctica. The domesticated chicken is probably the most widespread bird in the annals of planet earth. If you measure success in terms of numbers, chickens, cows, and pigs are the most successful animals ever.

Alas, domesticated species paid for their unparalleled collective success with unprecedented individual suffering. The animal kingdom has known many types of pain and misery for millions of years. Yet the Agricultural Revolution created completely new kinds of suffering, which only became worse with the passing of the generations.

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At first sight, domesticated animals may seem much better off

than their wild cousins and ancestors. Wild buffalos spend their days searching for food, water, and shelter, and are constantly threatened by lions, parasites, floods, and droughts. Domesticated cattle, in contrast, enjoy human care and protection. People provide cows and calves with food, water, and shelter; treat their diseases; and protect them against predators and natural disasters. True, most cows and calves sooner or later find themselves in the slaughterhouse. Yet does that make their fate any worse than the fate of wild buffalo? Is it any better to be devoured by a lion than slaughtered by a man? Are crocodile teeth kinder than human steel blades?

What makes the existence of domesticated farm animals particularly cruel is not just the way they die but, above all, their living conditions. Two competing factors have shaped the lives of farm animals: On the one hand, humans want meat, milk, eggs, leather, animal muscle power, and amusement. On the other hand, humans have to ensure the long-term survival and reproduction of their farm animals. Theoretically, this should have protected animals from extreme cruelty. If a farmer milked his cow without providing her with food and water, milk production would dwindle, and the cow herself would quickly die.

Unfortunately, humans can cause tremendous suffering to farm animals without endangering their survival and reproduction. The root of the problem is that domesticated animals have inherited from their wild ancestors many physical, emotional, and social needs that are redundant in human farms. Farmers routinely ignore these needs, without paying any economic price. They lock animals in tiny cages, mutilate their horns and tails, separate mothers from offspring, and selectively breed monstrosities. The animals suffer greatly, yet they live on and multiply.

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Doesn't that contradict the most basic principles of Darwinian evolution? The theory of evolution maintains that all instincts,

drives, and emotions have evolved in the interest of survival and reproduction. If so, doesn't the continuous reproduction of farm animals prove that all their real needs are met? How can a cow have a "need" that is not really necessary for survival and reproduction?

It is certainly true that all instincts, drives, and emotions evolved under evolutionary pressure to survive and reproduce. However, when these pressures disappear, the instincts, drives, and emotions they had shaped do not evaporate instantly. Even if they are no longer instrumental for survival and reproduction, they continue to shape the subjective experiences of the animal. The physical, emotional, and social needs of present-day cows, dogs, and humans don't reflect their current conditions but, rather, the evolutionary pressures their ancestors encountered tens of thousands of years ago. Why do modern people love sweets so much? Not because in the early twenty-first century we must gorge on ice cream and chocolate in order to survive. Rather, it is because if our Stone Age ancestors came across sweet ripened fruits, the most sensible thing to do was to eat as many of them as quickly as possible. Why do young men drive recklessly, get involved in violent quarrels, and try their power in hacking confidential internet sites? Not because they wish to defy present-day state law (which forbids all these actions), but because they must obey ancient genetic decrees: 70,000 years ago, a young hunter who risked his life chasing a mammoth outshone all his competitors and won the hand of the local beauty—and we are now stuck with his macho genes.

Exactly the same kind of logic shapes the life of cows and calves in our industrial farms. Ancient wild cattle were social animals. In order to survive and reproduce, they needed to communicate, cooperate, and compete effectively. Like all social mammals, wild cattle learned the necessary social skills through

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play. Puppies, kittens, calves, and children all love to play because evolution implanted them with this urge. In the wild, they *needed* to play. Otherwise, they could not learn the social skills vital for survival and reproduction. If a kitten or calf were born with some rare mutation that made them indifferent to play, they were unlikely to survive or reproduce. Similarly, evolution implanted puppies, kittens, calves, and children with an overwhelming desire to bond with their mothers. A chance mutation weakening the mother-infant bond was a death sentence.

What happens when human farmers now take a young calf, separate her from her mother, put her in a tiny cage, vaccinate her against various diseases, provide her with food and water, and then, when she is old enough, artificially inseminate her with bull sperm? From an objective perspective, this calf no longer needs either maternal bonding or playmates in order to survive and reproduce. All her needs are being cared for by her human masters. But from a subjective perspective, the calf still feels a very strong urge to bond with her mother and to play with other calves. If these urges are not fulfilled, the calf suffers greatly.

This is the basic lesson of evolutionary psychology: A need shaped thousands of generations ago continues to be felt subjectively even if it is no longer really necessary for survival and reproduction in the present. Tragically, the Agricultural Revolution gave humans the power to ensure the survival and reproduction of domesticated animals while ignoring their subjective needs. In consequence, domesticated animals are collectively the most successful animals in the world, and at the same time they are individually the most miserable animals that ever existed.

The situation only became worse in the last few centuries, when traditional agriculture gave way to industrial farming. In traditional societies such as ancient Egypt, the Roman empire, or medieval China, humans had a very partial understanding of

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biochemistry, genetics, zoology, and epidemiology. Consequently, their manipulative powers were limited. In medieval villages chickens ran free among the houses, pecked seeds and worms from the garbage heap, and built nests in the barn. If an ambitious peasant tried to lock a thousand chickens inside a crowded coop, a deadly bird-flu epidemic would probably have resulted, wiping out all the chickens, as well as many of the villagers. No priest, shaman, or witch doctor could have prevented it.

Once modern science deciphered the secrets of birds, viruses, and antibiotics, humans could begin subjecting animals to extreme living conditions. With the help of vaccinations, medications, hormones, pesticides, central air-conditioning systems, automatic feeders, and lots of other novel gadgets, it is now possible to cram tens of thousands of chickens into tiny coops and produce meat and eggs with unprecedented efficiency.

The fate of animals in such industrial installations has become one of the most pressing ethical issues of our time, certainly in terms of the numbers involved. For nowadays most of our planet's big animals live in industrial farms. We imagine that earth is populated by lions, elephants, whales, and penguins. That may be true of the National Geographic channel, Disney movies, and children's fairy tales, but it is no longer true of the real world outside the TV screen. The world contains 40,000 lions and 1 billion domesticated pigs; 500,000 elephants and 1.5 billion domesticated cows; 50 million penguins and 20 billion chickens.

In 2009 there were 1.6 billion birds in Europe, counting all wild species together. That same year, the European meat and egg industry raised 1.9 billion chickens. Altogether, the domesticated animals of the world weigh about 700 million tons, compared with 300 million tons of humans, and less than 100 million tons of large wild animals ("large" meaning animals weighing at least a few kilograms).

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Hence the fate of farm animals is not an ethical side issue. It concerns the majority of the earth's large creatures: tens of billions of sentient beings, each with a complex world of sensations and emotions, who live and die as cogs in an industrial production line. If Peter Singer is right, industrial farming is responsible for more pain and misery than all the wars of history put together.

The scientific study of animals has so far played a dismal role in this tragedy. The scientific community has used its growing knowledge of animals mainly to manipulate their lives more efficiently, in the service of human industry. Yet this very same knowledge has demonstrated beyond reasonable doubt that farm animals are sentient beings, with intricate social relations and sophisticated psychological patterns. They may not be as intelligent as us, but they certainly know pain, fear, loneliness, and love. They too can suffer, and they too can be happy.

It is high time we take these scientific findings to heart, because as human power continues to grow, our ability to harm or benefit other animals grows with it. For 4 billion years, life on earth was dominated by natural selection. Now it is increasingly dominated by human intelligent design. Biotechnology, nanotechnology, and artificial intelligence will soon enable humans to reshape living beings in radical new ways, which will redefine the very meaning of life. When we come to design this brave new world, we should take into account the welfare of all sentient beings, and not just of *Homo sapiens*.

Animal Liberation Now raises ethical questions that every human should take to heart. Not everyone may agree with Singer's thesis. But given the immense power humankind wields over all other animals, it is our ethical responsibility to debate it carefully.

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PREFACE TO THE 2023 EDITION

Animal Liberation was first published in 1975, and quickly became known as the bible of the emerging and rapidly growing animal rights movement. Activists who rescued animals from laboratories or stole revealing videotapes of cruel experiments began leaving a copy of the book behind to show the ethical basis of their actions. The book's strength was its combination of ethical argument and accurate accounts of what happens to animals in laboratories and factory farms, often based on publications written by the experimenters themselves or by researchers investigating how to produce meat, eggs, and dairy products most efficiently. After the book appeared and spurred the growth of the modern animal movement, the pressure grew for changes in the conditions described in the chapters on the use of animals in research, and in factory farms.

Although *Animal Liberation* has never gone out of print since it was first published, and the central ethical argument on which the book rests has stood up well to more than forty years of challenges, much else has changed:

- In 1975, there was no animal rights movement, and anti-cruelty organizations were mostly concerned with dogs and cats. Now millions of people support organizations

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working to reduce the suffering of farmed animals and animals used in research.

- In a few U.S. states, these organizations have used citizen-initiated referendums to outlaw keeping farmed animals in cages or stalls too small to allow them to stretch their limbs, turn around, or walk a single step; but these extreme forms of confinement still dominate the states that produce the most pigs and have the most laying hens.
- In Europe, more comprehensive changes were implemented by national parliaments, and by the European Union as a whole.
- Political parties focused on justice for animals have won seats in European national parliaments, in the parliament of the European Union, and in state parliaments in Australia.
- The basic treaty of the European Union recognizes that animals are not mere items of property, conferring on them the legal status of a sentient being.
- The media no longer ridicules animal rights activists; mostly, it takes them seriously.
- In 1975, no one knew what the word "vegan" meant. Now it is widespread on restaurant menus and supermarket labels.

Yet this progress is not universal. As China became more prosperous, it has greatly expanded its animal production. It is now the world's largest producer of pigs and a huge producer of chickens and ducks as well. The expansion of China's animal production, many aspects of which are completely unconstrained by any national animal welfare laws, is not showing any signs of slowing. As I write this preface, huge skyscraper "farms," twenty-six stories high, with 400,000 square meters, or more than 4 mil-

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lion square feet, on each floor, are being built. When complete, they will be filled with millions of pigs.

The struggle for animal liberation has made progress since 1975—but we are still failing to prevent atrocities on a vast scale. As we shall see in chapter 3, in 2020, in the United States, a million pigs were locked in sheds to which heat and humidity were then added until they died of heatstroke. Awful as these deaths are, they are just one example of the suffering inflicted, every year, on the 83 billion mammals and birds raised and killed for food, the majority kept confined all their lives in crowded sheds, and never able to go outside. For them, and for all the others who will, unless there is a sudden and radical change, suffer and die in the decades to come, I have written *Animal Liberation Now,* renewing the argument of the original book and applying it to the conditions prevailing in the twenty-first century.

We know much more now about the consciousness of animals and their psychological, as well as physical, needs, than we did when *Animal Liberation* was first published. From orangutans to octopuses, we have come to understand the lives of the remarkable other animals with whom we share this planet. Rigorous scientific research has established that the capacity to feel pain is not limited to mammals and birds, but extends to fish and at least some invertebrates, not only octopuses, but also lobsters and crabs. This new knowledge increases the urgency of extending the circle of our concern, for we are raising and killing fish and other aquatic animals in even larger numbers than we do mammals and birds.

At the same time, we know that our greenhouse gas emissions are changing the climate of our planet, bringing unprecedented heatwaves, forest fires, and floods and putting all sentient beings, ourselves included, in peril. The meat and dairy industries contribute to this catastrophic change, on a scale comparable to that

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of the entire transport sector, thus providing another powerful reason for the change in our diet that animal rights advocates have long been urging. Ending factory farming would bring other environmental benefits too, cleaning up our polluted rivers, improving the air many rural people breathe, and dramatically reducing deaths from heart disease and cancers of our digestive system.

Animal Liberation Now shows that despite the greater prominence of the animal movement, we continue to mistreat animals on an incomprehensible scale. This book advocates a new ethic for our relations with animals that starts from the premise that they are sentient beings, with lives of their own to live, who have done nothing to deserve the suffering we inflict on them. This book is a call to join with others to bring about a radical change in the way we treat them.

Peter Singer

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CHAPTER 1

All Animals Are Equal . . .

or why the ethical principle on which human equality rests requires us to extend equal consideration to animals too

THE BASIS OF EQUALITY

"ANIMAL LIBERATION" MAY SOUND MORE LIKE A SPOOF OF OTHER liberation movements than a serious objective. In fact, the idea of "The Rights of Animals" was once used to parody the case for women's rights. When Mary Wollstonecraft, a forerunner of modern feminists, published her *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* in 1792, her views were widely regarded as absurd, and before long an anonymous publication appeared titled *A Vindication of the Rights of Brutes*. The author of this satirical work (now known to have been Thomas Taylor, a distinguished Cambridge philosopher) tried to refute Mary Wollstonecraft's arguments by showing that they could be carried one step further. If the argument for equality was sound when applied to women, why should it not be applied to dogs, cats, and horses? Yet to hold that these

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"brutes" had rights was manifestly absurd. Therefore the reasoning for the equality of women must also be unsound.

Let us assume that we wish to defend the case for women's rights against Taylor's attack. How should we reply? One way would be by saying that the case for equality between men and women cannot validly be extended to nonhuman animals. Women have a right to vote, for instance, because they are just as capable of making rational decisions about the future as men are; dogs, on the other hand, are incapable of understanding the significance of voting, so they should not have the right to vote. There are many other capacities that men and women share, while humans and animals do not. So, it might be said, men and women are equal and should have equal rights, while humans and nonhumans are different and should not have equal rights.

This reasoning is correct as far as the case for equality between men and women is concerned. The important differences between humans and other animals must give rise to some differences in the rights that each have. But there are also important differences between adults and children. Since neither dogs nor young children can vote, neither has the right to vote. Recognizing this, however, does not count against extending a more basic principle of equality to children, or to nonhuman animals. That extension does not imply that we must treat everyone in exactly the same way, regardless of age or mental capacity. The basic principle of equality does not require equal or identical treatment; it requires equal consideration. Equal consideration for different beings may lead to different treatment and different rights.

So there is a different way of replying to Taylor's attempt to parody the case for women's rights that does not deny the obvious differences between human beings and nonhuman animals but finds nothing absurd in the idea that the basic principle of equality applies to so-called brutes. At this point such a conclusion may

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appear unwarranted, but if we examine more deeply the basis on which our support for the equality of all humans rests, we will see that we would be on shaky ground if we were to demand equality for every member of the species *Homo sapiens* while denying equal consideration to nonhuman animals.

To make this clear we need to see, first, exactly what it is that we are asserting. Those who wish to defend hierarchical, inegalitarian societies have often pointed out that by whatever test we choose it simply is not true that all humans are equal, in the descriptive sense of that word. Humans come in different shapes and sizes; they come with different intellectual abilities, different physical strengths, different moral capacities, different degrees of sensitivity to and compassion for the needs of others, different abilities to communicate effectively, and different capacities to experience pleasure and pain. In short, if the demand for equality were based on the actual equality of all human beings, we would have to stop demanding equality.

Fortunately, there is no logically compelling reason for assuming that a factual difference in ability between two people justifies any difference in the moral weight we should give to their needs and interests. Equality is a moral ideal, not an assertion of fact. The principle of the equality of human beings is not a description of an alleged actual equality among humans: it is a prescription of how we should treat human beings.

Jeremy Bentham, the founder of the reforming utilitarian school of moral philosophy, incorporated the essential basis of moral equality into his system of ethics by means of the formula: "Everybody to count for one, nobody for more than one." In other words, the interests of every being affected by an action are to be considered and given the same weight as the like interests of any other being. John Stuart Mill said that the first principle of utilitarianism is "perfect impartiality between persons." A later

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utilitarian, Henry Sidgwick, put the point in this way: "The good of any one individual is of no more importance, from the point of view (if I may say so) of the Universe, than the good of any other." R. M. Hare, who held the chair of moral philosophy at the University of Oxford when I was a student there in the 1970s, argued that to make an ethical judgment sincerely, one must be willing to put oneself in the position of all of those affected by one's decision, and still wish that the judgment be carried out. John Rawls, a professor at Harvard University and the most prominent American philosopher working in ethics in the same period, captured a similar idea with the device of a "veil of ignorance," behind which people must choose the principles of justice to govern the society in which they will live. Only after the principles have been decided upon, and the veil is lifted, will they find out what characteristics they have and what positions they occupy.[1]

It is an implication of this principle of equality that our concern for others and our readiness to consider their interests ought not to depend on what they are like or on what abilities they may possess. Precisely what our concern requires us to do may vary according to the characteristics of those affected by what we do: Concern for the well-being of children requires that we teach them to read; concern for the well-being of pigs may require no more than that we leave them with other pigs in a place where there is adequate food and room to roam freely. The basic element is taking into consideration the interests of the being, whatever those interests may be, and this consideration must, according to the principle of equality, be extended equally to all beings with interests irrespective of their race, sex, or species.

It is on this basis that the cases against racism and sexism must ultimately rest; and it is in accordance with this principle that speciesism must also be condemned. Speciesism, in its primary and most important form, is a prejudice or bias in favor of

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the interests of members of one's own species and against those of members of other species, on the basis of species alone. A secondary form of speciesism occurs when we give more weight to the interests of some nonhuman animals of a particular species—dogs, for example—than we give to animals with similar interests but of a different species, such as pigs.[2]

BENTHAM'S QUESTION

MANY THINKERS HAVE PROPOSED THE PRINCIPLE OF EQUAL CONsideration of interests, in some form or other, as a basic moral principle; but few have recognized that this principle applies to members of other species as well as to our own. Jeremy Bentham was one of the exceptions. In a forward-looking passage, composed at a time when slaves of African descent had been freed by the French but were still enslaved in the British dominions, Bentham wrote:

> The day may come when the rest of the animal creation may acquire those rights which never could have been withholden from them but by the hand of tyranny. The French have already discovered that the blackness of the skin is no reason why a human being should be abandoned without redress to the caprice of a tormentor. It may one day come to be recognized that the number of the legs, the villosity [having fur] of the skin, or the termination of the *os sacrum* [having a tail] are reasons equally insufficient for abandoning a sensitive being to the same fate. What else is it that should trace the insuperable line? Is it the faculty of reason, or perhaps the faculty of discourse? But a full-grown horse or dog

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> is beyond comparison a more rational, as well as a more conversable animal, than an infant of a day or a week or even a month, old. But suppose they were otherwise, what would it avail? The question is not, Can they *reason*? nor Can they *talk*? but, Can they *suffer*?[3]

In this passage Bentham points to the capacity for suffering as the vital characteristic that gives a being the right to equal consideration. The capacity for suffering—or, more strictly, for suffering and/or pleasure or happiness—is not just another characteristic like the possession of reason or language, self-awareness, or a sense of justice. Those who draw "the insuperable line" with reference to these characteristics are including some beings with a capacity for suffering and excluding others. Bentham, on the other hand, is saying that we must consider the interests of *all* beings with the capacity for suffering or enjoyment. He is not excluding any interests from consideration, because the capacity for suffering and enjoyment is a prerequisite for having interests, a condition that must be satisfied before we can properly speak of interests at all. It would be absurd to say that it was not in the interests of a stone to be kicked along the road by a child. A stone does not have interests because nothing that we can do to it could possibly make any difference to its welfare. The capacity for suffering and enjoyment is, however, not only necessary but also sufficient for us to say that a being has interests—at a minimum, an interest in not suffering. Mice, for example, do have an interest in not being kicked along the road because they will suffer if they are treated in that way.

Although Bentham speaks of "rights" in the passage I have quoted, the argument is really about equality rather than rights. In a different passage, Bentham famously described "natural rights" as "nonsense" and "natural and imprescriptible rights"

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as "nonsense upon stilts." When he refers to moral rights, he is advocating protections for people and animals that ought to be recognized by law and by public opinion; but the real weight of the moral argument does not rest on rights, for they in turn have to be justified on the basis of their tendency to reduce suffering and increase happiness, not only in individual cases but in the long run and for all those affected. We can, therefore, argue for equality for animals without getting embroiled in philosophical controversies about the grounds for rights, or who has them, and which rights they have. The language of rights is a convenient political shorthand that is even more valuable now, in the era of the eight-second soundbite, than it was in Bentham's day; but it is not essential to the argument for a radical change in our attitude toward animals.

If a being suffers, there can be no moral justification for refusing to take that suffering into consideration. No matter what the nature of the being, the principle of equality requires that its suffering be counted equally with the like suffering—insofar as rough comparisons can be made—of any other being. If a being is not capable of suffering, or of experiencing pleasure or happiness, there is nothing to be counted. So the limit of sentience (using the term to indicate the capacity to experience pain or pleasure) is the only defensible boundary of concern for the interests of others.

Are we not justified, though, in giving greater weight to the interests of other humans—because they are members of our own species, whereas other animals are not? Such claims—that "*we* are . . . (insert the name of the group we identify with) and *they* are not"—have been used previously as a justification for refusing to give equal consideration to the interests of others. Racists violate the principle of equality by giving greater weight to the interests of members of their own race, and sexists violate it

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by favoring the interests of their own sex. Today we can recognize such purported justifications for racism and sexism as spurious ideologies that were accepted only because they served the interests of the dominant group. Similarly, speciesists allow the interests of their own species to override the greater interests of members of other species. In each case there is a dominant group that sees those outside it as inferior in order to justify using them as they, the dominant ones, wish.

You might be thinking: No, humans are different! We are smarter than animals, we are rational beings, we are self-aware, we plan ahead, we are free, we are moral agents. Hence we have rights that other animals do not have, and we are entitled to use other animals as we wish. But, as Bentham pointed out, this argument has the implication that human infants—who are less rational, less self-aware, and less capable of planning ahead than many nonhuman animals—would also lack rights, and we would thus be entitled to use them as we use animals. The same would hold for some humans beyond infancy who, whether from a genetic abnormality, or brain damage, will never match the cognitive capacities of some nonhuman animals. Moreover, a series of studies led by Harvard psychology researcher Lucius Caviola, together with other researchers in psychology and philosophy at Oxford and Exeter universities, has shown that differences in mental capacities don't really explain why people give humans moral priority over other animals. On the contrary, when subjects were asked to say whom they would help in a situation in which they must choose between a human and a chimpanzee, 66 percent chose to help the human, even when told that the chimpanzee had more advanced mental capacities than the human.[4]

In the first edition of this book, I discussed the view put forward by Stanley Benn, a widely respected philosopher who spent most of his academic career at the Australian National University,

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that we should treat beings according to what is "normal for the species" rather than according to their actual characteristics, and that it is therefore justifiable to give priority to humans over animals, even in a situation in which the human has a lower mental capacity than the animal. Since then other philosophers have defended similar views.[5] The research carried out by Caviola's team shows, however, that the typical mental capacity level of a species had no significant effect on the answers that the participants in their study gave to questions about whom they would help. This does not, of course, refute the ethical claim that this should make a difference, but it does show that this doesn't seem to be an important factor in why people think that humans have a higher moral status. I will return to the ethical claim in chapter 6.[6] Caviola and his colleagues conclude that "the central driver of moral anthropocentrism is speciesism."

WHO CAN SUFFER?

MOST HUMAN BEINGS ARE SPECIESISTS. THE FOLLOWING CHAPters show that ordinary human beings—not a few exceptionally cruel or heartless humans, but the overwhelming majority—are complicit in the continuation of practices that thwart the most important interests of nonhuman animals in order to promote far less significant human interests. For completeness, however, before I describe those practices, I should address a question that I sometimes still encounter (though much less frequently now than when I first began discussing the question of animal suffering): How do we know that animals other than humans feel pain?

The first step toward answering this question is to ask: How do we know if *anyone*, human or nonhuman, feels pain? We know, from our own experiences, that we ourselves can feel pain.

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But how do we know that anyone else feels pain? We cannot directly experience anyone else's pain, whether that "anyone" is our best friend or a stray dog. Pain is a state of consciousness, a "mental event," and as such it can never be observed. Pain in others can only be inferred from behavior like writhing, screaming, or drawing one's hand away from a flame; or perhaps from a brain-imaging device that indicates what is happening in the relevant parts of our brain.

In theory, we could always be mistaken when we assume that other human beings feel pain. It is conceivable that one of our close friends is really a robot, programmed to show all the signs of feeling pain but really no more sensitive than any other intelligent machine. Although this possibility presents a puzzle for philosophers, not one of us has the slightest doubt that our close friends feel pain just as we do. This is an inference, but a perfectly reasonable one, based on observations of their behavior in situations in which we would feel pain, and on the fact that we have every reason to assume that our friends are beings like us, with nervous systems that can be assumed to function as ours do and produce similar feelings in similar circumstances.

If it is justifiable to assume that other human beings feel pain as we do, is there any reason why a similar inference should not be justified in the case of other animals? The Cambridge Declaration on Consciousness, issued by an international group of prominent neuroscientists meeting in Cambridge in 2012, confirms that although human beings have a more developed cerebral cortex than other animals, this part of the brain is concerned with thinking functions rather than with basic impulses, emotions, and feelings. As the Declaration states, "The weight of evidence indicates that humans are not unique in possessing the neurological substrates that generate consciousness. Nonhuman animals, including all

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mammals and birds, and many other creatures, including octopuses, also possess these neurological substrates."[7]

Nearly all the external signs that lead us to infer pain in other humans can be seen in other animals. The behavioral signs of pain vary with the species but may include writhing, facial contortions, whimpering, moaning, yelping or other forms of calling out, the appearance of fear at the prospect of the pain being repeated, attempts to avoid the source of pain—and to avoid places where pain occurred previously and instead seek places where the animals had only positive experiences—and so on. In addition, we know that other mammals have nervous systems similar to ours, which respond physiologically as ours do when the animal is in circumstances in which we would feel pain: an initial rise of blood pressure, dilated pupils, perspiration, an increased pulse rate, and, if the stimulus continues, a fall in blood pressure. Moreover, when these animals are given analgesics—the same forms of pain relief we take—both their pain behavior and the physiological indicators of pain are reduced. For example, in an experiment led by T. C. Danbury, of the Department of Clinical Veterinary Science at the University of Bristol, chickens taken from commercial flocks were offered two differently colored foods, one of which contained carprofen, an anti-inflammatory drug. Birds who were lame (which, as we shall see in chapter 3, is common among commercially raised chickens) chose more of the food with carprofen, and their limping decreased in proportion to the dose they consumed, thus showing a close parallel with the effect that relieving pain has in humans and indicating that the injured birds were likely to be experiencing pain when walking.[8]

The nervous systems of other animals were not artificially constructed as a robot might be constructed to mimic the pain behavior of humans. They evolved, no doubt, because a capacity

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to feel pain enhances animals' prospects of survival, leading them to avoid sources of injury and death. Most of this evolution took place among the ancestors we share with other vertebrates, before we diverged from them.

It has long been accepted as sound policy in science to search for the simplest possible explanation of whatever it is we are trying to explain. It is simpler to suppose that nervous systems that are virtually identical physiologically, have a common origin and a common evolutionary function, and result in similar forms of behavior in similar circumstances, also operate in a similar manner—that is, by giving rise to similar conscious experiences—than it is to hold that despite all these scientifically demonstrable parallels, when it comes to subjective feelings, our nervous system operates in a manner that is entirely different from the way the nervous systems of other vertebrates operate.

When I wrote the first edition of this book, psychological research on animals was just starting to emerge from a period dominated by a form of behaviorism based on the belief that science should refer only to what can be observed. It was thought to be "unscientific" to explain the behavior of animals by referring to the animals' conscious feelings, desires, or purposes. To avoid using terms like "pain" that refer to mental states, the behaviorists filled scientific journals with papers saying that the rats or dogs on whom they were using electric shocks would, when shocked, display "aversive behavior."[9] Then in 1976 Donald Griffin, a researcher with a distinguished record of research in animal behavior, published *The Question of Animal Awareness*, which asked why scientists refused to recognize awareness in nonhuman animals. The book was like a pin to the behaviorist balloon. Once Griffin had raised the question, it became obvious that behaviorist explanations of animal behavior—even something as simple as explaining why a well-fed rat will not pass over an electrified floor

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in order to obtain food, whereas a half-starved rat will—are more complex than explanations that attribute conscious experiences of pain and hunger to the rat. For we know that any explanation of human behavior in analogous situations—such as a hungry person stealing food despite the risk of punishment—that did not refer to one's mental states, both positive and negative, would be incomplete. Today it seems almost laughable to offer an account of why an animal avoids electric shock without reference to the animal finding the experience painful or unpleasant.

One difference between humans and nonhuman animals is that humans, beyond a certain age and without profound cognitive disabilities, are able to use language and so tell us when they are in pain. Animals are, with some limited exceptions, not able to use language, or at least not one that we can understand. It might be claimed, therefore, that the best evidence we can have that another being is in pain is that they tell us that they are, and so with animals we must remain in doubt, as they cannot tell us. Yet, as Jane Goodall pointed out in her pioneering study of chimpanzees, *In the Shadow of Man*, when it comes to the expression of feelings and emotions, language is less important than nonlinguistic modes of communication such as a cheering pat on the back, an exuberant embrace, a clasp of the hands, and so on. The basic signals we use to convey pain, fear, anger, love, joy, surprise, sexual arousal, and many other emotional states are not specific to our own species.[10] The statement "I am in pain" may be one piece of evidence for the conclusion that the speaker is in pain, but it is not the only possible evidence, and since people sometimes tell lies—and a robot can say "It hurts"—not even the best possible evidence.

Even if there were stronger grounds for refusing to attribute pain to those who do not have a language, the consequences of this refusal might lead us to reject that conclusion. Human infants

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and very young children are unable to use language. Are we to doubt that a year-old child can feel pain? If not, language cannot be crucial. Of course, most parents understand the responses of their children better than they understand the responses of other animals; but this is just a fact about the greater contact we have with our own infants as compared to animals. Those who have animals as companions soon learn to understand their responses as well as we understand those of an infant—and sometimes better, because the minds of mature dogs and cats are closer to our own than are the minds of infants in the first months of life.

DRAWING THE LINE

THERE IS NO LONGER ANY SERIOUS DISPUTE AMONG SCIENTISTS that at least some nonhuman animals can feel pain and experience other conscious states, both positive and negative. The livelier scientific controversies now are about which animals are, or may be, capable of conscious experience. The beings to whom zoologists apply the term "animal" range from mammals to sea sponges, and there is no good reason to believe that the boundary between animals and plants coincides with the line between beings who can suffer and beings that cannot. Hence, in order to know when the principle of equal consideration of interests applies, we need to know where to draw that line.

Scientists studying pain in animals have developed experimental methods that include examining whether the behavior suggestive of pain that follows a painful stimulus is reduced by the administration of drugs similar to those that alleviate pain in humans. They may also look for evidence of an animal engaging in trade-offs between a painful experience, or the risk of one, and an opportunity for a reward, such as food. They see this kind of

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flexible decision-making as indicative of a centralized processing of information that involves a common measure of value.[11] This kind of evidence is, however, still only available for a few species.

As we have just seen, with mammals and birds, the evidence for a capacity to feel pain is overwhelming. Among other vertebrates, we catch or raise, and kill, vastly more fish than we do reptiles or amphibians. For that reason, I will just note in passing that there is evidence that reptiles and amphibians can suffer[12] and consider in more detail the evidence about fish.

Fish

Victoria Braithwaite, professor of fisheries and biology at Pennsylvania State University until her death in 2019 and the author of *Do Fish Feel Pain?*, was one of the first scientists to investigate the nervous systems of fish, as well as their behavior in situations that might cause them pain. Her team was the first to show that fish have nociceptors, the sensory receptors that have been shown, in mammals and birds, to detect signals from damaged tissue. She also examined the behavior of fish when they experience something that would cause us physical pain: for example, an injection of vinegar or bee venom into the lips. She found that these stimuli cause fish to behave in ways suggestive of pain, including more rapid breathing, rubbing of the lips, and disregarding other things that are going on in their tank to which they would normally react. These changes in behavior may last several hours, but giving the fish painkillers such as morphine hastened a return to more normal behavior. Fish learn to avoid unpleasant experiences, like mild electric shocks, but they may also engage in the motivational trade-offs mentioned previously, and not only for food: Some fish will choose to endure electric shocks in order to be close to a companion.

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These observations indicate that fish satisfy the most important criteria for sentience, but it is also worth dispelling some of the myths about fish lacking cognitive capacities that mammals and birds have. Some species show reciprocal cooperation, taking it in turns to be vigilant for predators while their companion searches for food. Some fish engage in cooperative hunting, something that previously only social mammals had been observed to do, for it suggests both forethought and communication. More remarkably still, this cooperation can be between fish of different species. When a grouper, a large fish, is chasing prey who takes refuge in a crevice too narrow for the grouper to enter, groupers have been observed to swim over to a crevice in which a moray eel is likely to be hiding. The grouper then makes distinctive body movements that lead the eel to leave the crevice and swim with the grouper. When they reach the crevice where the prey fish is hiding, the grouper uses its body to point to it. The eel then enters the crevice. Often, this will flush the prey into open water, where the grouper is waiting to pounce. On other occasions the eel will be able to catch and eat the prey. In contrast to the cooperative hunting of social mammals, the carcass of the kill cannot be shared, because both the grouper and the eel swallow the prey whole. But with repeated occasions for cooperation, both the eel and the grouper benefit.

After summarizing the evidence from her own research and that of others, Braithwaite wrote: "Given all of this, I see no logical reason why we should not extend to fish the same welfare considerations that we currently extend to birds and mammals."[13] I agree, with the caveat that there are about 33,000 species of fish, or roughly five times the number of species of mammals, and research relating to the capacity to feel pain has been done on only a few of them. Braithwaite pointed out that scientists examining cartilaginous fish—sharks and rays—have not found

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