

Key Topics in Animal Ethics

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1. What's wrong with speciesism?
2. Personhood and moral status
3. The ethics of eating animals
4. Wild animal suffering





***Three baby animals –
Three very different
lives***

Speciesism as an ethical claim: It is justified to weigh the interests of different individuals differently according to their species

Moral considerability and interests

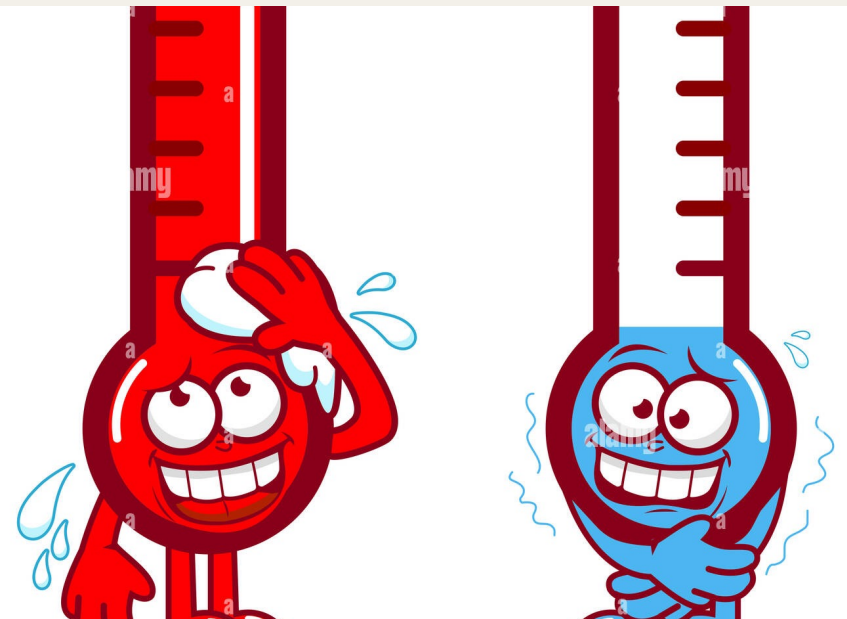
A *morally considerable* being is one that matters for its own sake – it can be wronged by our actions

Morally considerable beings have *interests* – there are things that can make their lives go better or worse



Sentience – a sufficient condition for moral considerability

Sentience is the capacity to experience positive and negative states of consciousness, such as pleasure and pain. All sentient beings have interests, and so are morally considerable.



Singer's argument against speciesism

Speciesism is a prejudice or attitude of bias in favour of the interests of members of one's own species and against those of members of other species (Singer, 1975)

It is wrong because it violates the Principle of Equal Consideration of Interests (ECI)

Analogy with racism and sexism

Equal consideration \neq equal treatment

Principle of equal consideration of interests

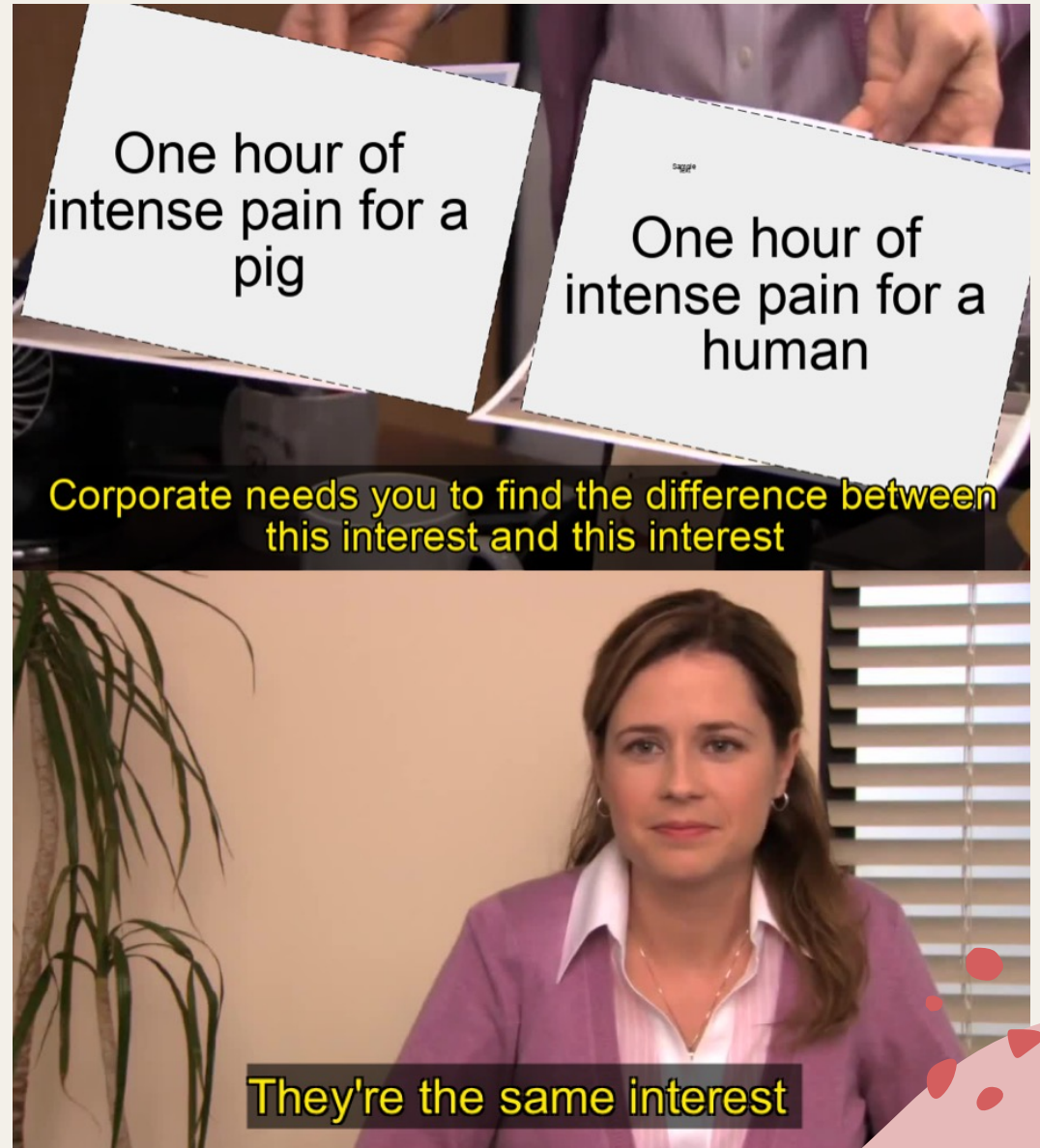
ECI - Like interests must be considered equally

- (1) We should give equal consideration to like interests
- (2) If we should give equal consideration to like interests, then we should give equal consideration to the equal interests of humans and non-humans
- (3) Therefore, we should give equal consideration to the equal interests of humans and non-humans

[Jaquet (2022)]

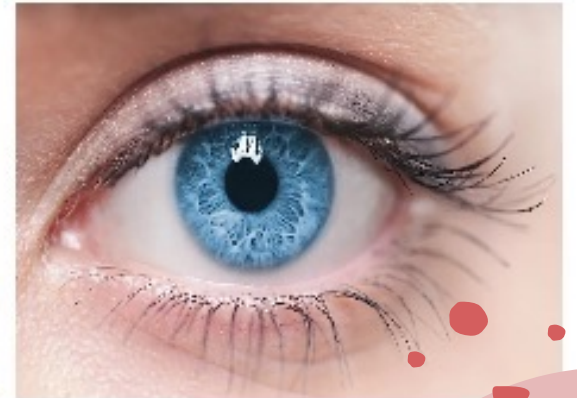
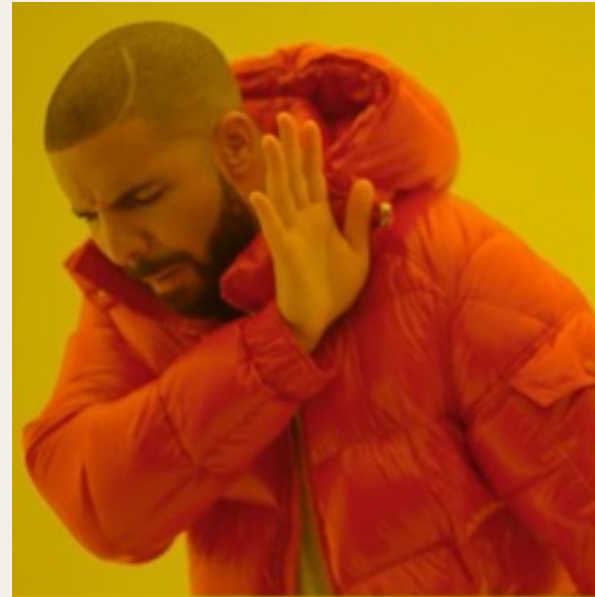
When are two interests alike?

The weight (or strength) of an interest is determined by how much the satisfaction of that interest contributes to the welfare of the individual who holds it



What does it mean to give like interests equal consideration?

To consider two like interests equally means that we see both as being of equal moral importance, and we do not discount the moral importance of one based on irrelevant criteria, such as the race or sex of the bearer of that interest



Does our treatment of Percy violate the ECI?

We routinely frustrate the most fundamental interests of other animals on factory farms. We frustrate Percy's interest in bodily integrity, in being able to form social relationships, to live in a pleasant environment, and to avoid fear, pain, and premature death.



Comparing interests

Frustration of Percy's interests \neq
Violation of ECI

How do the human interests at stake
weigh up?



How plausible is ECI?

+ Gives the right answer in simple ethical cases

+ Gives a plausible explanation of the wrongness of racism and sexism

+ Also applies to rational self-concern



Difficulties with the ECI



- Scepticism about animal interests



- Epistemological obstacles to weighing animal interests



- Badness of death for animals

How bad is death for nonhuman animals?



Humans often have future focused interests, and live long, high quality lives



Animals generally have fewer future focused interests, and shorter, lower quality lives

Kagan's Dilemma

Two interpretations of 'like' interests:

- (1) Equal impact on wellbeing
- (2) Alike in all morally relevant ways

On either reading, Singer's argument runs into difficulties

Kagan (2016)

(1) Equal impact on wellbeing: counterexamples

1

Desert - Ian the
Innocent vs Greg
the Guilty

2

Priority - Happy
vs Unhappy

3

Special relations
- Stranger vs
Friend

(2) Alike in all morally relevant ways: a trivial principle?

The second understanding of 'like' interests avoids the counterexamples of the first, but at the cost of rendering the ECI purely formal, and hence trivial

Allows the defender of speciesism to claim that species *is* a morally relevant factor



Jaquet's alternative argument

(1) We should give equal consideration to the equal interests of entities that differ only in their biological properties.

(2) If we should give equal consideration to the equal interests of entities that differ only in their biological properties, then we should give equal consideration to the equal interests of humans and non-humans.

(3) Therefore, we should give equal consideration to the equal interests of humans and non-humans.

[Jaquet (2022)]