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Humanities

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### Animal Rights for the Animal's Plight?

Human empathy has failed many times in history, allowing atrocious acts to be committed to those “othered” by society. The modern day is no different in regard to animal rights. However, when atrocities are committed there are always those that look to push back and fight against the powers that be enabling them from happening — animal rights are no exception. In “Babycakes” by Neil Gaiman as well as in “The Argument for Animal Rights” by Doris Lin, reasoning for animal rights is developed satirically and with a traditional argument respectively. However, their arguments are not equally effective due to their differences, and there is a clear victor in terms of the two. While Lin does create an easy-to-follow argument with rhetorical questions, but her argument ends up unconvincing as it ends up relying too much on empathy. Therefore, Gaiman ultimately writes the more effective piece through a stronger appeal to empathy and also an appeal to the desire to survive, as well as by addressing a larger audience through inclusive language.

In Lin's traditional argument, she parallels animal rights to human rights along with rhetorical questions to point out the hypocrisy of many Americans. Though her article can be understood by readers across the world, her primary audience is Americans, indicated by how she introduces her argument by pointing at the hypocrisy of Americans for saying they “love animals” (Lin) while also denying animals rights. She then goes on to represent the thoughts of her target with a series of rhetorical questions: “Isn't it enough that we treat them humanely?”

Why should animals have rights? What rights should animals have? How are those rights different from human rights?” (Lin) These major questions are answered chronologically throughout the piece, serving as the format of her argument. In essence, her usage of rhetorical questions in this way echoes the thoughts of readers and create a sense of relatability — it makes it seem as though the reader is going through the same logical thought process that Lin already has — and thus the read becomes more open to accepting the conclusion that she draws at the end of the piece. However, first she must reach that conclusion, and the first thing Lin does is explains how the current situation, a situation where “animal welfare” (Lin) is the norm, and how it is simply not the same as “animal rights” (Lin).

In explaining this concept, she appeals to empathy to drive the point home. She picks a particularly egregious where the farming industry sees “nothing wrong with killing male chicks by grinding them up alive.” (Lin) The example she picks is one that hits upon the reader's desire to protect the young and innocent- especially since baby chicks already have a cultural significance in America of being “cute”. By doing this, she picks out how the current system allows for such an awful act to be committed, and that why animal rights would prevent the unjust act. .She also anticipates the myth of “cage-free eggs” (Lin) and makes it clear that the suffering resulting from cage-free eggs and other eggs is the same. In doing this, she establishes a clear point — human exploitation of animals goes deep, and there is no way to exploit animals without causing their suffering.

Next, she further expands on the hypocrisy of many Americans by addressing how the justification for human rights is the same as those for animal rights - in order to prevent unjust suffering. She references how “an international panel of neuroscientists declared in 2012 that non-human animals have consciousness” (Lin), giving her a strong premise because scientists are

respected. By establishing sentience for animals, she has made them into beings that can suffer—just like humans can. Now, she is able to draw parallels between human rights and animal rights as well as appeal to empathy. She says, “[s]peciesism, like racism and sexism, is wrong,” (Lin) and thus because animals suffer just like a human would, laws are needed to prevent them from suffering just as they exist for humans.

However, her final paragraph fails to tie everything together into a call for action, and instead looks at what an “ideal” (Lin) world would look like for animal rights supporters. Though she concedes that animal rights would be far subdued compared to human rights, being ultimately just “leaving the animals alone,” (Lin) history shows that humanity has a desire to conquer. It is only in her described “ideal” (Lin) world that the animal rights would truly be respected. Even her reference to the “United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights” (Lin) is unconvincing, as even basic human rights are often not respected in the modern world. If people cannot be bothered to respect other human’s rights, would they even give a second thought to the suffering from animals if it meant profits? Though everything up until this point has been good, her final statement of what animal rights should be is simply unrealistic and many readers will then brush off everything she has already said, especially as the reader is unaware of any personal expense to them.

On the other hand, Gaiman is able to do everything Lin’s argument does in his satirical piece and more. Through his use of the word “we” (Gaiman) throughout the passage, Gaiman represents the thoughts of humanity in his satirical piece, not just Americans. This means that his piece will appear equally strong as long as the reader is human and lives in modern consumerist society. Furthermore, this means that there is no room to hide from the situation he describes. Despite the reader not having committed any of the actions or not really being in the

“Babycakes” world, the “we” (Gaiman) puts the reader in the perspective of the narrator. It is impossible for the reader then to ignore the similarities between the callousness towards babies by the narrator with the modern-day justification for the treatment of animals.

By choosing babies as the replacement for animals, Gaiman has chosen a subject that elicits an even stronger emotional desire to protect than baby chicks. Humans are tribal creatures and will protect one of their own much more strongly than the others. Therefore, the babies in “Babycakes” will draw more sympathy and attention than the real-world example by Lin. Furthermore, substituting babies in for animals in his piece, he highlights the atrocities committed by people on animals. The description of baby flesh as “tender and succulent” (Gaiman), baby leather as “soft and comfortable” (Gaiman), and the various actions that humans in “Babycakes” perform on babies all serve as a representation of exactly what happens to animals. This way of showing the horrors of the acts committed unto animals by humans is far more effective than Lin’s lacking description of the male chicks and impersonal representation of animal suffering. Gaiman, in his detail, makes the reader squirm when reading this part of the passage. Thus, if they cannot bear the thought of babies going through this action, how can they be morally justified to expect animals to?

Finally, Gaiman does not explain the ideal world like Lin does—rather, he goes in the opposite direction and shows the impacts that continued animal exploitation will have. Near the end, the narrator states, “Yesterday, all the babies were gone” (Gaiman) just like how he states the animals had “went away” (Gaiman). Despite not directly stating that it was the human exploitation of babies and animals that caused their disappearance, the casual tone indicates just that. It shows that the narrator and society had placed such an importance on preserving the system that not only did an extreme callousness develop towards animal suffering (and babies),

but society as a whole then over-exploited the babies and animals to the point of extinction. The narrator also gives a reason for this— he holds the belief that humans “superior to the animals and the babies.” (Gaiman) It is because of this human hubris and indifference towards vulnerable groups that the people of “Babycakes” have over-exploited the babies and animals to the point of extinction. Allowing the reader to again draw the parallels between the real world and his satirical piece, Gaiman indicates that current unabated exploitation of animals will lead to something apocalyptic like in “Babycakes”. By showing the impacts of what animal exploitation will have on the world and humanity, Gaiman appeals to more than not only human empathy, but also the human desire to survive, which is arguably just as strong as empathy. This is of course stronger than Lin’s argument because Gaiman shows what the impacts of no change will be on the human side, which is much more difficult to brush off than impacts on just animals as in Lin’s argument.

Despite Lin creating a clear-cut argument using rhetorical questions and then appealing to empathy, her argument falls is nullified by her call-to-action at the end which relies too much on empathy, allowing many readers to brush off her conclusion. On the other hand, Gaiman uses inclusive language addressing a larger audience, a stronger appeal to empathy than Lin’s argument, and also an appeal to the human desire to survive to top which will be more convincing to those who are callous to the plight of animals. Given the relatively slow pace at which equality and justice progresses, it will likely not be anytime soon that solid animal rights become established. However, that is why it is all the more important to continue pushing for these rights as in and Gaiman both do. In fact, looking back on history and witnessing the atrocious acts having been committed, but at the same time being condemned by society at large

gives hope and light to the future, one can only hope that those in the future looking back on today will see the acts we commit as indelibly awful.

## Citations

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## Babycakes (by Neil Gaiman)

A few years back all of the animals went away.

We woke up one morning, and they just weren't there anymore. They didn't even leave us a note, or say goodbye. We never figured out quite where they'd gone.

We missed them.

Some of us thought that the world had ended, but it hadn't. There just weren't any more animals. No cats or rabbits, no dogs or whales, no fish in the seas, no birds in the skies.

We were all alone.

We didn't know what to do.

We wandered around lost, for a time, and then someone pointed out that just because we didn't have animals anymore, that was no reason to change our lives. No reason to change our diets or to cease testing products that might cause us harm.

After all, there were still babies.

Babies can't talk. They can hardly move. A baby is not a rational, thinking creature.



And we used them.

Some of them we ate. Baby flesh is tender and succulent.

We flayed their skin and decorated ourselves in it. Baby leather is soft and comfortable.

Some of them we tested.

We taped open their eyes, dripped detergents and shampoos in, a drop at a time.

We scarred them and scalded them. We burned them. We clamped them and planted electrodes into their brains. We grafted, and we froze and we irradiated.

The babies breathed our smoke, and the babies veins flowed with our medicines and drugs, until they stopped breathing or their blood ceased to flow.

It was hard, of course, but necessary.

No one could deny that.

With the Animals gone, what else could we do?

Some people complained, of course. But then, they always do.

And everything went back to normal.

Only...

Yesterday, all the babies were gone.

We don't know where they went. We didn't even see them go.

We don't know what we're going to do without them.

But we'll think of something. Humans are smart. It's what makes us superior to the animals and the babies.

We'll figure something out.

# The Argument for Animal Rights (Doris Lin)

Advocacy groups and humanitarians alike have long argued for the rights of animals around the world, fighting for their right as sentient creatures to a life free of torture and suffering. Some advocate for not using animals as food, clothing or other goods and others such as vegans even go as far as to denounce the use of animal by-products.

In the United States, people often say that they love animals and that they consider their pets to be part of the family, but many draw the line at animal rights. Isn't it enough that we treat them humanely? Why should animals have rights? What rights should animals have? How are those rights different from human rights?

The fact of the matter is that since the U.S. Department of Agriculture issued the 1966 Animal Welfare Act, even animals used in commercial farming are entitled to a certain base-level of treatment. But that differs from the wants of animal rights activist groups like People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) or the more extreme British direct-action group known as the Animal Liberation Front.

## Animal Rights Versus Animal Welfare

The animal welfare view, which is distinguishable from the animal rights view, is that humans can use and exploit animals as long as the animals are treated humanely and the use is not too frivolous. To animal rights activists, the main problem with this view is that humans do not have the right to use and exploit animals, no matter how well the animals are treated. Buying, selling, breeding, confining, and killing animals infringe on the animals' rights, no matter how "humanely" they are treated.

Furthermore, the idea of treating animals humanely is vague and means something different to everyone. For instance, an egg farmer may think that there is nothing wrong with killing male chicks by grinding them up alive to cut feeding costs versus yield. Also, "cage-free eggs" are not as humane as the industry would have us believe. In fact, a cage-free egg operation buys their eggs from the same hatcheries that factory farms buy from, and those hatcheries kill the male chicks as well.

The idea of "humane" meat also seems absurd to animal rights activists, since the animals must be killed to obtain the meat. And for farms to be profitable, those animals are killed as soon as they reach slaughter weight, which is still very young.

## Why Should Animals Have Rights?

Animal rights activism is based on the idea that animals are sentient, and that speciesism is wrong, the former of which is scientifically backed — an international panel of neuroscientists declared in 2012 that non-human animals have consciousness — and the latter is still hotly contested among humanitarians.

Animal rights activists argue that because animals are sentient, the only reason humans are treated differently is speciesism, which is an arbitrary distinction based on the incorrect belief that humans are the only species deserving of moral consideration. Speciesism, like racism and sexism, is wrong because of animals popular in the meat industry like cows, pigs and chickens suffer when confined, tortured and slaughtered and there is no reason to morally distinguish between humans and non-human animals.

The reason that people have rights is to prevent unjust suffering. Similarly, the reason that animal rights activists want animals to have rights is to prevent them from suffering unjustly. We have

animal cruelty statutes to prevent some animal suffering, although U.S law prohibits only the most egregious, extraordinary animal cruelty. These laws do nothing to prevent most forms of animal exploitation, including fur, veal, and foie gras.

## Human Rights Versus Animal Rights

No one is asking for animals to have the same rights as humans, but in an animal rights activist's ideal world, animals would have the right to live free of human use and exploitation — a vegan world where animals are no longer used for food, clothing or entertainment.

While there is some debate as to what basic human rights are, most people recognize that other humans have certain fundamental rights. According to the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights, human rights include "the right to life, liberty and security of person..an adequate standard of living...to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution...to own property...freedom of opinion and expression...to education...of thought, conscience and religion; and the right to freedom from torture and degrading treatment, among others."

These rights are different from animal rights because we have the power to ensure that other humans have access to food and housing, are free from torture, and can express themselves. On the other hand, it's not in our power to ensure that every bird has a nest or that every squirrel has an acorn. Part of animal rights is leaving the animals alone to live their lives, without encroaching on their world or their lives.