

Medium Rare Morals: A Moral Justification of Meat Eating

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents arguments for, and against, vegetarianism. Arguments offered by Singer, Regan, Kant, and Leahy are some of those considered. This paper investigates the possibility that animals have rights and the idea that people have duties towards animals. The degree to which animals possess sentience and self consciousness and the implications of those qualities are addressed. Whether animals have an interest in their lives is questioned, and the possible ramifications of that interest on vegetarian theories explored. Human superiority, along with superiority's relevance, is evaluated. The conviction that vegetarianism is not a moral necessity permeates the paper.

People do not usually give much thought to the origins of their "steak and potatoes" meal. After all, it's not a very pleasant thing to consider. Many vegetarians believe that thinking about where meat comes from is unpleasant because eating meat is morally wrong. Immorality, though, does not necessarily follow from unpleasantness. Vegetarians and meat eaters alike have many arguments to defend their positions. These arguments are generally concerned with the morality of *meat* eating. Some theorists, however, have claimed that if one were really interested in not killing, then one would refrain from killing vegetables as well as animals. One could opt for a strictly frugivorous diet, as eating only the fruit of a plant would allow that plant to continue living. Yet, according to *Funk & Wagnall's Encyclopedia* (1983), several characteristics distinguish plants from animals, characteristics that may well put them on separate moral footing. Animals generally possess sensory capabilities, they "actively acquire food and ingest it internally," and they tend to be mobile. Plants generally lack sensory capabilities, employ the process of photosynthesis, and are usually rooted. Despite their differences, plants and animals do have in common the possession of life. Those who argue for an absolute right to life simply by virtue of living will have the most difficulty dealing with this troublesome link between the plant and the animal kingdoms.

For our purposes we will consider that the differences between the two kingdoms sufficiently separate them, and we will concentrate only on the morality of *meat* consumption. Any discussion that has this focus will necessarily involve the following key issues: superiority, self consciousness, reasoning, moral capability, rights, duties, and sentience. The arguments that arise from these issues are not as clear cut as one may think. Meat eating is closely intertwined with

many other questions concerning the well being of animals. It is a topic that contains several gray areas, and much medium ground. Nonetheless, after considering each side's arguments, tentative conclusions are possible. Although many classic meat-eating defenses do not stand up well to scrutiny, animal rights activists have not proven vegetarianism (whatever its benefits) to be a moral necessity.

Most vegetarians are not opposed to non-human carnivores (flesh-eating animals), perhaps due to a belief that vegetarianism is a moral decision, which should not be attributed to animals. Of course there are exceptions. Members of Hedweb, a European based vegetarian group, remain opposed to natural carnivores. They believe that in addition to humans becoming vegetarians, carnivores should be subdued and food animals protected even from their natural predators. Although, this particular theory would seem to have unpleasant ecological consequences, such an absolutist position is not totally without merit. Proponents would argue if something is wrong for one person to do then it is wrong for all people to do. In this case, however, true carnivores may be logically permitted to argue some variant of self defense, for their very survival depends upon the death of another. Self defense cannot be easily argued for humans since we are not carnivores. Humans are omnivores (flesh *and* vegetable eating animals). Furthermore, after considering the available data it seems clear that most humans can get what they need in a vegetarian diet.

Why, then, do we eat animals? Perhaps we do it because they taste good, or because it is easy, or because we are used to it, but are these reasons good enough to kill? If not, then are there any reasons that justify the slaughter of animals? Meat consumption in the continental United States seems particularly difficult

to justify. Yet, consider the culture of the far north, where people need the nutrients found in meat and do not have other readily available sources. The situation of these people is similar to that of non-human carnivores. The survival of both groups depend upon the food animals they kill. A similar argument used by Hedweb could also be employed here. If it is wrong for other humans to eat meat, then isn't it wrong for the people of the far north to do the same? Some would argue that killing animals can be acceptable, provided the animal's death is necessary to one's survival. Still, if it is only wrong to eat animals when one can afford not to, then isn't vegetarianism more of a nicety than a moral principle? Moreover, if the rule does not hold in such a situation, then are we not conceding that killing these animals *is* morally acceptable, and that their lives are in fact worth less than ours?

We are all familiar with the usual claims of human superiority: language, reason, emotion, etc. These claims are often used to justify the consumption of non-human animals. Vegetarians strongly object to the use of such claims. They argue that animals, to varying degrees, possess these traits, and that people, to varying degrees, often lack these traits. Consequently, some animal rights activists would say establishing superiority is an impossible task. Superiority, they would say, does not "mean" anything. They believe superiority is nothing more than an anthropocentric judgement, (e.g., humans believe art to be a superior activity, because humans value art.) Indeed, the idea that human activities are superior because we consulted ourselves and decided they were, does not strike one as very objective. Besides which, we have all seen animal abilities that seem superior to our own in one way or another. Therefore, vegetarians often hold that humans are not superior to animals, that superiority is merely a subjective idea. The implication is we should not believe killing and/or eating animals is morally correct, when we (humans) are no better than the animals we seek to kill. Meat eaters disagree. They tend to believe superiority is a matter of fact, or descriptive of some reality. They argue there are several skills which separate human beings from other animals. Language is likely the most important of these skills, as it becomes the building block for various other parting points between the species. Language is defined as, "the expression and communication of emotions or ideas by some means." Language is also characterized as, "the impulses, capacities, and powers that induce and make possible the creation and use of language" (Funk & Wagnall's 1983). Language is more than just the act of communicating, it is also the underlying capacity to create communication. The use of language involves applying symbols to new objects, having conversations, and questioning one's surroundings. Parrots have the ability to speak, yet do not use language. Deaf and/or mute people may not speak, but they can and do use language. Many scientists would hold that apes, chimps, dolphins, and some

whales have the ability to use language, but much controversy exists over this assertion. The use of language is the crux of reasoning and self-consciousness, and so also autonomy (independent decision making) and moral behavior. So much so, that Max Black, in *The Labyrinth of Language*, was compelled to write, "on this skill [language, symbolic thought] depends everything that we call civilization. Without it, imagination, thought, even self knowledge, are impossible" (Leahy 33). The self knowledge or self consciousness that Black spoke of is pivotal in deciphering whether or not animals have a right to life, or at least an interest in their own lives.

Author Michael Leahy describes self consciousness in many ways, one of which is being aware that one is aware of some stimulation. For example, a dog that eats is obviously aware that it is hungry, yet is it aware, that it is aware of its hunger? Is it only reacting to stimuli or can it think about and reflect on its hunger? This process is what Leahy calls a "language game." He would hold that language is a prerequisite for self consciousness. One can recognize "a" without language, but to know, to be aware that one is recognizing "a" requires words, symbols, language. According to Leahy, Wittgenstein, and Cook, language would, for similar reasons, be a prerequisite to beliefs and reasoning (147). They would ask how one could reason, formulate thoughts, or build knowledge without language? How is a dog to reason why it is behaving a certain way, or reflect on something that is happening, without any language to express that behavior or event to itself? St. Thomas Aquinas, thirteenth century theologian and philosopher, would say that animals have "imperfect knowledge," that they have only a "mere apprehension of the end," or the purpose of their actions, rather than a real understanding (40). Tom Regan and Peter Singer would deny St. Thomas's theory. They believe the ability of animals to reason and hold beliefs is evidenced by animal behaviors. Meat eaters would likely respond to this by pointing out Skinner, Pavlov, and other scientists who have studied animal behaviors, have had little difficulty in explaining the behaviors of most animals in the terms of instinct and environmental stimuli. Of course, a great deal of human behavior can be explained in these terms as well, and such an explanation does not negate our self consciousness. It is a generally accepted fact, however, that "lower" animals rely much more heavily on such instincts than do humans.

The idea of animals having an interest in their own lives and that we should not treat them like things is a cornerstone in many vegetarian theories. Tom Regan, philosophy professor and author, has argued that an animal's interest in staying alive is cause enough to demand humans refrain from meat eating (Regan 197). Many would question that position. After all, even mosquitoes would seem to have an interest in living, as they strive to avoid death. We do not find many peo-

ple, though, even those who are vegetarians, actively opposing the death of mosquitoes. We do sometimes hear of those who would assert that the mosquito's life should only be taken if the cause outweighs the animal's interests. Yet, how would one prove animals have such interests? Clearly, all animals try to stay alive, but does this really show they possess an interest in living? Is it possible for a being that lacks language to understand that it is living, in order to have a conscious interest in continuing its life? Or are the actions taken by animals to avoid death merely of their nature or instinct? Scientists called ethologists believe that behavior sequences have been programmed in animals' genes to varying degrees throughout the animal kingdom. Animal behaviors, then, would reflect that instinct and would not necessarily portray any underlying possession of interests. Michael Leahy would not disagree. He believes that humans can act *in* the interest of animals (as when we de-flea our dogs because it is in their interest to be rid of fleas), but would claim, that humans decide animals' interests, and would not readily accept the idea that animals who are not self conscious can *possess* those interests within themselves (Leahy 67).

A great number of animal rights activists are self-described utilitarians. Utilitarians strive to do the greatest good for the greatest number. When making decisions, they are required to consider an animal's "feelings." What are we to make of an animal's feelings, though? Doubtless, many animals feel physical pain and show signs of fear. They may even be capable of sorrow. Still, when faced with death do they feel loss? Are they conscious that they are alive, in order to "know" the loss of death? Humans may fear the physical pain of death, but we are often more pained by the prospective lack of our existence. If an animal's interest in living is no more than an instinct not to die or to avoid pain, then it is a wholly different matter. Growing old may be very painful for the animals. The only benefit to living longer, then, would be more life. Yet, if they are not conscious of that; if they do not realize or appreciate their life, then one could reason it is less cruel to put them down *painlessly* while they are still healthy. Jeremy Bentham, a philosopher best known for his writings on utilitarianism, observed that a natural death in the wild could well be an excruciating experience (Baker 129). As such, animals may actually benefit from escaping a death in the wild even if that death were replaced with another. Furthermore, Bentham, in *A Utilitarian View*, seemed to hold that for an animal, death alone, *without pain*, need not be considered an evil at all (129). When humans die "early" the tragedy is in the loss of potential life. Often, it is the anticipation of this loss that makes death sad or painful, more so than the physical suffering. The sort of self consciousness and understanding that allows such an anticipation of death may not even be possible without language, and as such would not apply to animals.

Moral superiority is another frequent claim of human supremacy. Many meat eaters believe this claim to be self evident. No matter how gifted one's pig is, it will not give its food to someone because it believes that to be the *right* thing to do. Animals may act out of loyalty or affection, but they do not make moral decisions. When humans are able to live to their full potential, they are capable of using reason and acting morally, along with other things characteristic of human beings. Moral superiority, though, is diligently denied by some vegetarians, who would argue that humans, although different, are not morally superior, and cannot righteously consume animals. In response to this frequently-used argument, Richard Coniff has asserted that an inherent flaw lies in the idea that humans are not superior and therefore should not eat animals. If one starts with the premise that humans are not superior to animals, one has two options. Either we are not superior to animals, and knowing this gives us permission to eat them. Or we are not superior animals, and knowing this gives us the moral obligation not to eat them. At which point, we become morally superior. Thus, the original theory is contradicted. If we were morally equal, we would have no qualms about eating animals, as they would have no *moral* problem in consuming humans. So, by not eating them for moral reasons we become morally superior, in which case we are not equal, but superior. This exercise may contradict the theory that humans are not in any real way superior to animals, but it only does so when humans refrain from meat eating, a problem for those who view humans to always be superior. The argument also fails to show that meat eating is morally acceptable, only that vegetarianism makes us morally superior. Nevertheless, some merit exists in the idea of human superiority. Animal rights activists are not anxious to ascribe moral reasoning to non-human animals. Once moral reasoning has been attributed to a being, it can be held accountable for its actions. It can be found guilty. The activist position, then, rests more on the assumption that humans cannot righteously *judge* animal behaviors to be any better or worse than our own, and therefore cannot pronounce ourselves morally superior. Yet, even if meat eaters were to concede that they could not judge humans as morally superior (e.g., of higher moral fiber), it seems undeniable that humans are superior in their ability to use moral reasoning.

One could, without contradiction, be of the opinion that humans are superior to animals, and still hold the belief that humans should not consume animals. To defend such a position, however, one must believe that animals have at least some basic rights, rights that would spare the animals from being used as a means to human ends. In response to the idea of animals possessing rights, Bernard Williams writes, "there are good reasons for not inflicting pain on animals, but no particular point is made, except rhetorically, by grounding this in rights" (Leahy 187). He

seems to hold that animals are incapable of possessing real rights, and he is not alone. Immanuel Kant, the eighteenth century philosopher, contended that humans should not be used without their consent because of their ability to reason and make autonomous decisions. According to Kant, these qualities of reasoning and decision making differentiate humans from animals and give only humans the *right* not to be used. Unlike Kant, Peter Singer, a philosopher who has written extensively on animal rights, calls for the "equal consideration" of all beings in order to decide which rights they possess (Singer 150). In equal consideration, each animal is considered equally for each right. According to Singer, pigs cannot vote and so do not require this right. Pigs are capable of feeling pain and so have the right to be free from pain whenever possible (151). Seemingly, it would follow from Singer's position that as pigs are capable of living, they would require a right to life. The problem with this position is that worms (and plants) can also live. Need we ascribe rights to lady bugs and marigolds? Singer would hold these life forms need not be given a right to life, the same way that pigs need not be given the right to vote. In neither case, he would argue, could the species in question "appreciate" the proposed rights. To decide which animals can appreciate which rights or for which rights certain species qualify, Singer relies on the idea of sentience. Sentience is defined as having sensation or feeling. Ultimately, then, Singer calls for judging an animal's capacity to feel in order to evaluate its rights. Many subscribe to this view. They believe that we should respect an animal's level of sentience. For example, most people do not mind stepping on bugs, but would never dream of crushing a dog to death. This sentiment is likely due to the amount of pain we believe a dog is capable of feeling. While discounting many current farming practices, this line of thought does not necessarily apply to meat eating, it is possible to kill animals without causing them physical pain. Therefore, provided an animal was in no pain, according to this theory, its death would not be an injustice. The sentience defense, then, seems to make a better argument for treating animals decently while they are living, than it does for showing we should not kill them.

Theorists like Singer and Regan are calling for a type of rights they believe the animals possess by virtue of their being. Some would argue, though, such a thing does not exist. "Rights without the backbone of legal sanction," Bentham contends, "is just talk" (Leahy 193). Bentham, Leahy, and others would hold there are no natural rights. Bentham wrote in explanation, "want is not supply - hunger is not bread" (193). In other words, we do not naturally get something just because we have decided it is something we are entitled to or because it is something we need. Rights, he would claim, are a manifestation of human ethical and political systems, not something we come by from the nature of our existence, even if we use those natural

qualities to help us determine what our legal rights should be. Furthermore, Leahy would claim that in order to come up with a list of "natural" rights one must invoke moral arguments; arguments which are always up for debate and thus not really natural at all (193). Rights are decided upon and legislated by humans, or in Kant's terms, moral agents. Vegetarians often claim that rights are legislated by humans only because humans can speak, and if animals could speak, they would surely defend themselves. Leahy would argue that this is irrelevant, without language animals can never know of their rights, can never formulate a thought about them, and so do not really *possess* rights, as such, within themselves.

To complicate matters further, the policies humans have created concerning animal rights often seem to be full of contradiction. For one thing, legislation has been passed to protect animals from cruelty, yet we permit humans to kill them. Some vegetarians would charge those few protections we do afford animals are virtually meaningless, if the animal is left without the right to live. Certainly, though, whether or not one believes the death of an animal to be an injustice, these protections must be seen as meaningful if they spare the animal from any undo cruelty until its death arrives. Other vegetarians have argued by protecting animals our laws imply that animals do have rights, rights we must respect. Nineteenth century British philosopher D. G. Ritchie, would disagree. He would assert the protections that are afforded to animals do not show that they have rights, as such. He writes that animals "cannot be parties to a law suit, or said to be guilty, they cannot be subject to [the] duties that attach to rights" (181). In his view, then, without being subject to the attached duties, animals cannot lay claim to any rights. Ritchie also notes that many objects, such as valuable art, are protected from harm by the law. This protection does not imply that art has any real rights. Similarly, animal rights do not follow from animal protections.

Rights are generally thought of as implying certain duties. Human beings, for example, are commonly believed to have some sort of right to life. As a result of this right, when we encounter other humans beings, we have the duty not to end their lives. If animals, though, do not in any real sense possess rights, then in what way could humans be said to have duties toward them? In *Duties to Animals*, Kant writes, "animals are not self conscious and are there merely as a means to an end. That end is man." He continues, "our duties towards animals are merely indirect duties towards humanity" (Kant 122). Kant believes we should not harm animals because in doing so we indirectly damage our humanity. We may see ourselves or others as less human and may even become prone to cruelty on other levels. A subscriber to the view of indirect duties would believe that ultimately we (humans) only have direct duties to humanity. Many vegetarians have

feared this line of thought would lead people to conclude that as long as they were not harming rational humans, they could justifiably perpetrate cruelties on other animals. The view of indirect duties, then, is often criticized because it does not make cruelty to animals an absolute evil, rather it only discourages the practice because of its potential to influence the way we treat other humans. Yet those who postulated the theories of indirect duties (Kant, Ritchie, etc.) seemed to care about and not wish harm on animals. They seemed to be not so much condoning cruelty, as saying it is not directly because of the animal we should not be cruel. They are against cruelty and give cause to refrain from it. Nonetheless, one cannot deny this position leaves animals with no concrete rights. Meat eaters would maintain, however, animals need not have actual rights for humans to expect that animals be treated with a reasonable amount of compassion. Many believe indirect duties, despite their flaws, are enough. Others argue that humans have a natural inclination to be affectionate towards animals (Leahy 184). Still, although an inclination of this type may be a viable reason for expecting humans to behave kindly to animals, it does not establish that animals *should* be treated well (a priority for many activists). The expectation of fair treatment, warranted or otherwise, does not demonstrate that we can or cannot demand such treatment.

Not all vegetarians object to the view of indirect duties. Many would agree our ultimate duty lies with humanity, but would contend that this does not give us the right to kill animals, especially if the animal's death does not serve to save humanity from some detriment. These vegetarians do not see an indirect duties view as proper justification for meat eating. They would hold that, as moral agents, we are required to set a moral agenda which would exclude using animals as food, since food animals are not necessary to human survival. Debate rages, though, on both sides of the issue as to the truth of this statement, and the real effect that wide spread vegetarianism would have on the world.

Should one concede that non-human animals do not have rights and killing those animals that lack self consciousness is morally acceptable, one is immediately confronted with the issue of humans who, for whatever reason, are not self conscious. Author B.E. Rollin puts the dilemma rather elegantly when he asks,

What of an animal's right to life? The point seems clear. If one takes the position that human right to life is absolute then one must show a morally relevant difference between human and animal life that justifies denying that an animal's right to life is absolute

(199)

Peter Singer believes our preference of those humans who are in a vegetative state over other animals, especially those of the "higher" order, such as apes and

dolphins, to be clear cut speciesism (where like racism, one prefers or dislikes one type of species, race, gender, etc. *only* because it belongs to that species, race, gender, etc.) The problem is vegetative humans are not self conscious, and many people believe apes and whales may be. Even without self consciousness these animals seem to be leading a "fuller" life than vegetative humans. Singer believes we spare these humans solely on account of their humanity. For his position to hold, no "relevant distinctions" should exist between these situations (202).

The protection of such humans has been justified by those who observe that rather than judging things at the individual level, humans often consider the abilities of a species as a whole or that species' potential for certain behaviors. If someone found a pig that could use reasoning skills and make moral decisions, we would be likely not just to refrain from eating that particular pig, but to refrain from eating all pigs because we would need to redefine the potential of that species. In this view, if the highest potential of a species is to feel pain, then one should not hurt them, if it is to know death, to be self conscious, then one should not kill them. Seemingly, this position would safe guard all disadvantaged members in a given species. Yet, one quickly finds a problem of logic. The theory, although safeguarding the weaker members of a species, gives no logical reason for doing so.

Leahy has four replies to the accusations of speciesism leveled by Singer. He starts by noting, if indeed normally functioning humans are separated from all other animals by language, or some other factor, (as he would argue) then "it would seem reasonable to accord something like honorary status to those existing in [normal humanity's] image, as it were, but otherwise enfeebled through age or retardation" (204). Such a position does seem reasonable. Affording honorary status is a common practice in our daily lives. Furthermore, when a person or an object is afforded an honorary status, that person or object generally receives the benefits that go with that status. Yet, one could argue, the granting of such benefits is not obligatory, when the status is merely honorary. If that was the case, the benefits may more readily cease, in the face of an opposing interest. It is worth noting that in many ways this is how we currently behave toward such humans. Few would have any lasting doubt (assuming no emotional connection), given the decision of whether to save a normally functioning person or one in a vegetative state from some disaster. The honorary status, then, does not need to hold in every situation equally, in order for us to continue treating these vegetative humans as we would others humans, as long as the situation allows. Secondly, Leahy points to our natural compassion for the enfeebled, and how compassion is stronger within our own species (204). Yet, this may speak more for Singer's position than for Leahy's. If we help our own kind only because we

naturally "feel" more for them, then wouldn't we by definition be speciesist? Maybe not. Although author Bonnie Steinbeck holds the similar position that human sentimentality motivates the protection of vegetative humans, she believes this sentimentality is an important part of our humanity, and not simply a prejudice towards other animals (MacKinnon 384). Leahy's third argument rightly points to the fact that most human "patients" have friends and relatives whose feelings must be considered (Leahy 205). Certainly, the feelings of other conscious beings should be considered and respected. However, society often protects humans in a vegetative state, and without family, as diligently as we do those with family. Furthermore, it seems less than wise to allow a measurement of how much one is cared for by others to be the criterion for keeping patients alive. Nevertheless, the feelings of other conscious beings should be *a* criterion, even if they cannot be *the* criterion. Leahy's final reply, is to reverse the argument, to say perhaps we need not protect these frail humans, to say maybe they are no "better" than animals; lacking self consciousness, they have no more awareness than non-human animals, and thus no more rights (205). Grim, yes, but not illogical.

Finally, a great number of meat eaters defend their eating habits by referring either to their nature or to their religion. Many believe eating meat is natural for humans. They would not deny humans are omnivores, but would note we have evolved with the body mechanisms to consume and process meat. Meat eating is seen as something we were meant to do, and thus not an evil. Clearly, humans do come equipped to eat meat. However, we are equipped and capable of doing many things that are not moral. Capability, then, is not a valid argument for righteousness. Those who refer to their religion for justification usually point to either their tradition or their holy book. The Old Testament, the New Testament, and the Koran, each give humans permission to consume at least certain meats. Despite their inherent wisdom, these books have often been used to justify actions that most of us do not consider morally correct, such as slavery. Using them as sole justification for one's actions, then, should be viewed with caution. Moreover, while arguments of morality should ideally agree with and complement one's holy book, to be convincing they should also stand upon their own merit.¹

Defending vegetarianism is not a difficult task when one considers the amount of cruelty animals currently endure while waiting for market. A gut-wrenching view of such cruelties is recounted in Peter Singer's

"Down on the Factory Farm" (Singer 23). Unpleasant as it may be, though, the fact that food animals are suffering in our current system does not show killing animals is immoral. This is not to say we should not work for reform. Society may need to be willing to pay more for meat and perhaps farmers need to be willing to charge more in order to allow for changes in the system. Nonetheless, many vegetarians feel the conditions which animals are now subjected to would be, "unacceptable [even] in the short term" (Leahy 220). That being the case, vegetarianism is certainly an appropriate option.

I am not, however, convinced that the slaughter of an animal is, in itself, an evil. In my view, the decision hinges upon the issue of self consciousness. My position, then, would necessarily forbid eating/killing any apes, dolphins, etc. that use language or are otherwise proven to be self conscious.² (Even now, the controversy concerning the abilities of these species would cause me to refrain from the practice.) This seems to leave me with the general position, that if a being were found to have no further potential and lacked self consciousness, it would be morally acceptable to kill that being. I find this position less than comfortable in the case of *human* beings. As previously mentioned, though, good reasons can be found for keeping such humans alive and in my opinion these reasons are enough to justify the practice. Nonetheless, without referring to an argument that includes religion, a *conclusive* decision for the immorality of killing these humans is arduous. Still, there are points to be made on both sides of the argument, and I will look to future debates on the subject with much interest.

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¹Many religious meat eaters would argue that God's acceptance of meat consumption is not a misinterpretation on their part. They claim to discount this revelation would be to discount the existence of a personal God, in which case, they would argue this issue, among others, would lose its import. This line of thought, however, leads to a discussion of whether or not cause to be moral exists in the absence of a personal God, which is a hotly debated topic in its own right, and one we will leave for others to dispute.

²Several difficulties could arise were self consciousness, and thus some form of rights ascribed to another species. Debates on the language abilities of apes and dolphins have been heated for quite some time and may someday lead us down such a path. Might self consciousness bring with it more than a right to life? Would we be required to keep injured apes on life support? Should we actively protect them from other species and themselves? Should deformed or retarded apes be spared the death that would normally await them in the wild? Or would it perhaps be enough to let the animals alone and refrain from actively killing them or interfering with their lives? Questions like these will surely arise, and will not be easily answered, should any other species be declared self conscious.

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