



## “Animal Right”: A Challenge for African Ethics

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### ABSTRACT

This work is an evaluation and a contribution to the ongoing debate on animal right. The research sets out to emphasize that animals are very important species as humans are and as such; animals should be free from human maltreatment and exploitation. The central problem here is whether animal life has intrinsic value as that of human being? This possess a serious challenge for African ethics (the idea and beliefs concerning what is right or wrong, good or bad, acceptable or not acceptable in the African society etc). The question of whether animals have rights and to what extent is an unending and inconclusive issue in philosophy. Arguing from utilitarian point of view, animal experimentation for instance, is morally right *Ipsa Facto* because it is not an end in itself but for the greater benefit of others. But is this not simply directed to the happiness of humans and not the animals? Arguing from Deontological ethics, the work hold that killing of animals is bad. Using the tool of critical analysis, this work evaluates the proposition of both the proponents and opponents of animal rights but rejects the positions of the opponents. The work argues that animals should be considered morally because they feel pains, suffer, get happy and sad, play etc. The work therefore submits that maltreatment of animal is morally wrong.

**Keywords:** *M. indica*; phytochemical, antimicrobial, histopathological, haematological, wound healing

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

Large numbers of animals are killed daily either by laboratory experimentation as a large portion of these research cause the animals unnecessary discomfort, suffering and pain while providing no benefits to the animals or human beings. More so, wild animals are shot and killed each year by hunters for eating and in order to satisfy man's taste for flesh. Over five billion animals are bred and slaughtered every year for eating. Animals become means to an end. Animals become object of use on a daily basis. An estimated 200 million animals are used routinely in laboratory experiment around the world annually. Over 650 different species of animals now threatened may be extinct by the turn of the century. These realities have caused many people to question our relationship to non-human animals. (Gruen 1993: 343). Animals have suffered lots of violence from man and man maltreats animal without recognizing the fact that they are part of the environment. One question that comes to mind is: why do we conserve nature? Do we conserve nature because of its intrinsic value or for anthropocentric reasons?

The idea for the conservation of nature began in the twentieth century. In an article titled “animals” Peter Singer emphasized that:

In the 1970s, two related but distinct movements challenge the dominant human attitude towards nature. The environmental movement insisted that it was wrong to think of the natural world as existing solely in order to provide us with fields to till, beautiful sunsets to contemplate, building materials for houses and an ocean into which we can dump our wastes... In the same period, the animal liberation movement reacted against the traditional attitude that human interests always take priority over those of non-human animals....The environmental and animal liberation movements have often worked together on issues of mutual concern. (2001: 416).



From the forgoing, both the environmentalist and animal liberation movement wanted man to value and cherish nature independently of the benefits they may get from nature and they argue against prejudice or bias members of the other species suffer. "They argue that all sentient beings have interests and we should give equal consideration to their interests, irrespective of whether they are members of our species or of another species." (Singer 2001: 416). Sentientism therefore means that an entity is conscious of pleasure and pain. It also refers to "... consciousness of something or other." (Verner 2001: 192). Human as well as animal possesses consciousness (consciousness of pleasure and pain).

There is no gain doubting the fact that man exploited nature. Sterba rightly observe that "nature is raped, mastered, conquered, controlled, mined. Her "secrets" are "penetrated" and here "wombs" is put into the services of the "man of science". "Virgin timber" is felled, cut down, fertile soil in tilled and land that ties "fallow" is "barren", useless." (1997: 450). Man does not respect the laws of nature; as such man does no respect animals. Man's needs make him kill animals for his sustainability. This exploitation must have been informed by the biblical Genesis 1:26-28 where God instructed man to have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the fowl of the air and over everything that moves on the earth. This informed Singer to assert thus:

...the dominant western tradition, for the benefit of human beings. God gave human beings dominion over the natural world and God does not care how we treat it. Human beings are the only morally important member of this world. Nature itself is of no intrinsic value, and the destruction of plants and animals cannot be sinful, unless by this destruction we harm human beings. (2001: 417).

The western societies capitalized on this biblical instruction and exploited nature to the fullest for economic and developmental purposes. There exchanged good and services from what they derive from nature and built modern cities. Their anthropocentric approach was that everything that existed should be evaluated in terms of its utilization for man, thereby committing speciesism. Traditional African societies on the other hand saw the environment/nature from two perspectives: vital force and co-beings with nature. Traditional African society treated the environment with dignity. That is, they respected nature.

Traditional African societies extended the natural community to lower species. African approach to nature was more conservative than the West. Although Africans killed animals through hunting for survival, it did not undermine the fact that in traditional Africa society, animals were seen as divine and sacred and it is a taboo to kill some animals. In an article titled "Animals in traditional worldview of the Yoruba" Ajibade George Olusola asserted that:

Among such rules are, for example, the taboo of killing a mating animal... This is to show that the Yoruba believe that animals like humans are able to feel pain, pleasure, joy fear and so on. That is why this kind of taboo is strictly adhered to especially by the hunters, and a violation of the taboo may turn against them, i.e. they may have similar experience when they are with their wives, ... Likewise, some animals are regarded as sacred and can neither be killed nor eaten. (No p).

With the emergence of African philosophy, one of its branches "African ethics" is faced with a challenge as to whether it is morally right or wrong to kill or maltreat animal.

This work shall emphasize that although animals play a great role in religion, politics, social, economic and domestic domain of human beings, animals should be should not be treated cruelly and as such be accorded some respect because animals feel pains, get sick, play, get happy and sad, have sex (contribute to the continuation of nature), etc. Animals should be treated with respect and dignity. Before going into establishing this fact, two concepts will be clarified respectively, there include: rights and ethics. Also, this work shall reject the teleological approach to the treatment of animals and adopt the deontological approach to the treatment of animals stating that killing of animals is *ipso facto* bad in itself.



### 1.1 Conceptual Clarification

**Right:** A right is what one is due. It is by nature what one should be given. Fagothey identified two ways which right is used. They include: "1. right as opposed to wrong. 2. Right as correlative to duty." (1986: 288). According to him, "In ethics right means that which squares with the norm of morality and thus is morally good... right also mean that which is just: a just law, just dead, just debt, just claim, that which is owed. This is right as correlative to duty... (1986: 228). Here, right is opposed to wrong; something that is not correct. Right is perceived as good. From the foregoing, what constitute right? Even though human are always considered more when talking about rights, are human bound to respect only human right?

**Ethics:** Moral principles the guide human conduct is called ethics that deals with the rightness or wrongness of human actions. Morality therefore is the basis for ethics. This means that ethics is the reflection and systematic study of morality. Ethics is a science of good conducts. Its job is to instruct us on how to be good men if we wish to be. (Ozumba 2008: 13). Similarly, Uduigwomen emphasized that morality... becomes the yardstick or thermometer for measuring good and bad actions. (2). The emphasis he is freedom. Man is free to act morally right or morally bad. It therefore means that ethics also has to do will choice. You either choose to be good or bad; you either do what is morally wrong or right.

Ethics therefore is tripartite in nature. Firstly it identified actions such as justice, honesty, fairness, charity as morally right or good. Secondly it identified actions such as stealing, dishonesty, arm robbery, drug abuse etc as wrong or bad actions and finally, it identified actions such as killing, euthanasia, abortion, polygamy, smoking, alcohol etc where opinion differs probably because of the situation and some countries or societies see them as good while other societies see them as bad. In all, "morality... should be the guide of a healthy society. Any society that is dominated by unethical practices cannot be a healthy society. (Omoogun 2009: 13). Having known what Ethics is all about, we shall try to expose what African ethics means.

## 2. THE NOTION OF AFRICAN ETHICS

African ethics is a theory of right and wrong situated from the African please. It is also that theory which defines the norms that govern human conducts and relationships with one another and the environment within the geographic entity Africa. African ethic is therefore the study of morality within the African societies. African ethics emphasize that morality should be the guide for a healthy African societies. An African society that is dominated be unethical practices such as arm robbery, stealing, dishonesty, corruption, child abuse etc cannot be a healthy society. Morally becomes the yardstick or thermometer for measuring good or bad actions within the African place. van der Walt observes that "In traditional Africa a shared morality was the cement of society". (2003: 52).

Udokang stressed this fact when he asserted that:

Tradition and custom in African society, defined the various aspects of human behaviours and social activities that we approved and those aspects that are prohibited and forbidden. All the moral codes of morality were nearly in the form of prohibitions which were sanctioned by the deities and ancestral spirits. This account for why many scholars hold the view that African ethics and morality is derived from traditional religion. (2014: 268).

Prohibition tries to emphasize the value of the prohibited and actions that are right and wrong are detected by the gods (Supreme Being). The Supreme Being, the divinities and ancestral spirits were the main sources of African morality and ethics. This is why moral laws were inviolate and immutable and no offender was left unpunished (Udokang 2014: 268). Going by this, Etta and Asoquo note that African ethics has its source in religion and natural rights to reason. Accordingly, they assert that "The popular view is that of religion being the major source of African ethics. It forms the key note of African way of life hence African ethics is basically seen as a religions ethics, (dependent on religion). This makes it almost impossible to separate or explain African world views outside their religious lies. (Etta & Asoquo 2012: 56). "This implies that African traditional religion is the bedrock of traditional ethics. (Udokang 2014: 268).



Etta and Asuquo further notes that “It is strongly believed also that African traditional ethics is based on natural right of reason with conscience playing a central role. African moral standards, they argue are derived from the very nature of things which implies that ethics is founded on consideration from human welfare. (2014: 56). Based on the forgoing, I agree with Etta and Asuquo that African ethics is religious in nature and involves the welfare of the people. It is religious in the sense that it helps regulate human conducts towards what is right, good, correct, moral etc and it involves the welfare of all in the sense that it does not just cares for the needs of all and sundry but makes the common good realizable.

Another important thing to note about African ethics is that it is a character base ethics. A person with a good character is one who respects elders for instance, who keeps to parental principles and standards, who do not steal or kill. On the other hand a person with a bad character is one who disrespects the parents, elders, and do not keeps to societal norms etc. Ozumba observed that “In the African setting, goodness amounts to those acts, attitudes and behavior which are congenial to the attainment of peaceful communal coexistence. An act is regarded good if it does not jeopardize the spirit of oneness, solidarity and single purpose that guide the social existence of men in the society. (2009: 182).

### 3. THE NOTION OF ANIMAL RIGHT

As stated earlier, there exist a debate on animal right. While some opponent believe animal don't have rights, proponent believe that animal have right. Amongst such opponent of animal right, is Ingreemar Nordin. In his article titled “Animals Don't Have Rights: A Philosophical Study” holds that:

Non-human animals lack absolute and inviolable rights in this sense. They have neither full nor partial natural rights. The reason is that they simply lack the biological disposition for being moral agents. Contrary to the case of humans, the method of their survival and development does not build in rationality. Instead there are other properties, such as speed, strength, fertility or ability to feed on grass, that have made them what they are. The distinguishing quality of mankind, to survive with the help of its rationality, has at the same time involved the creation of a new dimension of reality, namely the world of moral value. But in order that man shall be capable of exercising his moral judgment it takes right- and rights entail mutual human respect. Other animals have what they always have had, namely the natural properties for survival and reproduction that are theirs. (2001:11).

The point Nordin is making here is that animal lacks rationality and cannot have a moral value. Accordingly, animal's ability only resides in reproduction and survival without rationality but here those properties of speed, strength, fertility and eating. He even denied animals moral values, he insist that “it is man who directly or indirectly assigns value to them.” (2001: 11).

Contrary to this view, proponent of animal right believe that the issue of speciesism is a result of bias and prejudice. “Species – the word is not an attractive one, but I can think of no better term- is a prejudice or attitude of bias towards the interests of members of one's own species and against those members of other species.” (Singer 1997: 460). Interest becomes the main reason why animal are treated the way these are treated. Man's interest to be precise but not animal interest. It is crucial to note that animal have interest. Animal have interests, Singer maintains, because they have a capacity for suffering and enjoyment. According to the principle of equal consideration there is no justification for regarding the pain animal feel as less important than the same amount of pain (or pleasure) humans feel. (Sterba 1997: 449).

This interest of animals lies in their ability to feel pain and pleasure. If asked if animal feel pain or pleasure, the answer is yes. Unfortunately, the racist violates the principle of equality by favoring members of his own race. The sexist violate the principle of equality by favoring the interests of his own sex. Similarly the specisist favors the interest of his own species over the interests of members of other species. (Singer 1987: 461).



Interest becomes the yardstick for the maltreatment of the animal species by the human species. This human species goes a long way to destroy the forest were some animal stay for their own interest, making lots of animals to suffer intensely. Singer lamented in these words “forests are homes to millions of animals who will die from starvation and stress when the trees are felled. The suffering and death of these wild animals makes the cleaning of the forests even worse than it would be if only human beings benefited from them.” (2001: 422). The reason for this interest-treatment animals receive is because a lot of human beings are speciesists. According to Singer, “...the overwhelming majority of humans allow their taxes to pay for practices that require the sacrifice of the important interests of members of other species in order to promote the most trivial interests of our species.” (1997: 461).

One of the foundational questions to pose is what if animals interest overrides human interest what will man do? What if animals use man for experimentation and factory breeding? What if man stays in the forest animal destroys the forest for their interests? What if man feels pain and animals don't recognize man's pleasure and pain? This are question that man need to reconsider and recognize the fact animals feel pain and there is no good reasons, scientific or philosophical for denying that animals feel pain. Hence there can be no moral justification for regarding the pain (or pleasure) that animals feel as less important than the same amount of pain or (pleasure) felt by humans. (Singer, 1997: 464). The point here is that animals feel pain and pleasure just like man does. As such, man should treat animal with respect because they feel pain and have a feeling for pleasure. Do the rights of animal have any moral consideration? This will pose a lot of challenge for African ethics. Are this challenge negative or positive and how do we address this challenge? This is what the next section attempts to show.

#### 4. A CHALLENGE FOR AFRICAN ETHICS

I have earlier stated that African ethics is the study of morality within the African society. The question is does animal have any moral contribution to the society? It is a truism that animals co-exist with human in Africa (and every other society). Before we highlight the challenge animal right have for African ethics. Deontological ethics holds that actions are good or bad in themselves irrespective of the consequences. That is to say, they are actions that are intrinsically good or intrinsically bad. For the purpose of this work, killing of animals in any form is bad because animal have life and feel pain. Deontologists believe using animals for experiment is bad because it causes pain, suffering and death.

On the other, teleological ethics holds that “...an agent performs a morally right action if such action will maximize good and minimize evil...” (Ochulor and Bassey 2012: 180). This means that no action is good or bad in itself and using animals for experimentation is not bad in itself because it brings greater happiness to man. The teleological view is anthropocentric because is centers on mans benefits. The teleologists believe using animals for experimentation is good and will benefit a great number. The question of whether animals should be considered morally and to what extent is not just an unending and inconclusive issues but it posses the following challenge for African ethics.

- (1) Does it imply that there will be no more consumption of meat? This questions animals that are hunted in the forest for meals and those that reproduced sporadically for economical gains.
1. It places question on the use of animals for sacrifice and other rituals in African and beyond. African ethics will be faced with this challenge because in African for instance some cultures use both animals and man as sacrifice to their gods. How do we resolve this paradox?
  - Is there any way animal life is equal to human life? The value of life is the apex of all values and the value of animal life should not be treated with less importance. Animals also have vital force. There exist divided camps as to whether animals should be given moral consideration. So is it moral to take a life whether animal or man? More so, African ethics will be faced with a challenge of extending the moral community to the lower species because; are animals seen as co-beings or are they protecting animals for anthropocentric reasons?
- I. If animals have equal rights with humans, why won't other non-human realities not have the same rights? This could lead to the argument that humans and animals should stop feeding on plants.
- [1] Do animal become ancestors when they die? If Africans so belief in ancestorship, what happens to the animals when they die?

Figure 1. Do animals reincarnate when they die? This will question African belief in reincarnation and the place of animal reincarnation

- Where do we place the argument for transmigration of souls? (That is, the view that when humans die their souls are transmigrated to animals or plants). So if this is the case, animals should not be killed.
- 1 The question of animals that are used as pet and animals used in experimentation. The question is: are all these animals not the same species? Why are some treated with care, love, respect and others made to feel pain in experimentation? it is crucial to note that “the conditions under which animals are kept and the ways in which they are used by factory farmers, experimenters, furriers, commercial developers and others, tend



to disregard the fact that animals are living, feeling creatures". (Gruen 1993: 343). Opponents believe "that animals are not members of the moral community and therefore humans have no moral obligation to them. (Gruen 1993: 343). For the utilitarian or utilitarianism believe that the experiments carried on animals is *ipso facto* morally right because the research is not an end in itself but for the greater benefit of others. These benefits are for humans not the animals. Is it morally right to encourage the use of toxicity testing on animal by industrial organizations to investigate how safe products are to human? Do animals benefit from this experimentation? (Omoogun 2009: 71). I will like to emphasize that weather the experiments will benefit man or both man and animals, animal will continue to be used for experimentation.

**TABLE I.** Does it imply that communication will be the yardstick for measuring a social group? Do animals interact? Does Language because a yardstick to judging whether animals have a right or not? Ludwing Wittgenstein is usually associated with the view of attributing states of consciousness to being without language. This position seems to be very implausible. But does state of pain have anything to do with language? (Singer 1997: 463). The emphasis Singer is making here is that language is not a yardstick to judging weather animal have moral consideration or not because, even though there can't communicate through language, there do feel pain and pleasure.

- a) Another important point to note is the issue of choice. Accordingly, Gruen holds animals are not moral agents. While they have choices, their choices are not the sort we would call value choice – choices which underlie ethical decisions. (1993: 344). From the foregoing, animals and marginal human beings are not members of the moral community because they can't make choices or take decisions on their own but contrary to this position of fox, he recognizes that animals and 'marginal' human deserve certain moral considerations and includes them within the moral community because they are being who can suffer. (Greun 1993: 345).
- Another challenge African ethics faces is animal that are kept in zoo. Concerns have also been raised over animals kept zoos. Some think that zoo is beneficial in terms of education, conservation and zoological researcher. Others think that zoo provides an unnatural habitat and climate for the animals. Others still think that zoos confinement and imprisonment. How moral is man to keep animals in confinement when he fights against being confined? (Omoogun 2009: 72). African ethics will have a challenge of confining animals in an unnatural habitat when men don't like being confined.



## 5. CONCLUSION

It is very important to note that some animal rights activist call for a total liberation of animal. Others hold that there should exist some relationship between animal and human where human respects animal because they feel pain and pleasure. And finally those who believe that animal don't have right at all because there are of a lower species and can't reason. But it is also crucial to re-emphasize that animals are being slaughtered everyday on the altar of experimentation and are feasted every day on our dinnings forgetting the fact that:

1. Animals have life
2. Animals were created by a divine being like man
3. Animals breath this same oxygen man breath
4. Animals make choices like man do in areas that interest them.
5. Animal evolution has not yet stopped just like men. Animals could evolve into better creatures them man.
6. Animal might have soul just like man have since they are created by a divine being.
7. Animals might be ancestors when there die like man.

From the above points therefore, African ethics is faced with a challenge of how to treat animals. Is it morally right or wrong to kill or eat animals? This are the question African ethics will try to handle with regard to the call for the rights of animals. Thus, this paper insist that animals should be considered morally because animals feel pains, there feel sad and happy, get sick, have sex as such contribute to the continuation of nature. etc. For this reasons animals should be accorded some respect. Animals should not be subjected to violent sport, fragile and endangered animal species should be protected. Animal habitat should not be destroyed. Even though we keep some animals as pets, some animals should not be taken away from their habitat. All animals should not be killed either by hunting, experimentation or for food. Thus, arguing from a deontological perspective, this work emphasize that we should avoid using animals as means to an end. Also, we should consider the fact that animals have the ability to suffer as humans do not question animal.



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