

‘Dismantling “Reason-based Moral Status” in Environmental Ethics ’¹

By

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Abstract

*This article critically explores the assumptions of ‘reason-based moral status’ theorists, as well as ‘sentient’ theorists in establishing moral status. While ‘reason based moral status’ theorists regard **reason** as the key defining feature of moral status; Peter Singer names **sentience** as the defining characteristic of moral status. Having looked closely at these submissions, I argue that both arguments are morally repugnant. I maintain that reason is just but one criterion of establishing moral status and it will be wrong to suppose that only reason defines moral status, as non-human animals are not endowed with this capacity and hence cannot be disadvantaged because of a capacity which they do not possess in the ‘state of creation.’ In my submissions I also observe that sentience has degrees which Singer fails to identify and discuss. My thesis is at variance with these two positions; for I take it that sentience may not be limited to a mere feeling of pain and pleasure. Against this background, I dismiss Singer’s sentience argument and call for a return to the ‘state of creation’ where all living beings are equal on the basis of having life-span, species and genus specifications, the brains as well as having flesh and blood.*

Introduction

In this article, I try to argue for a position which grants moral status to human beings and other animals without necessarily having to tap into ‘reason-based’ and ‘sentience-based moral status’ theories. I admit though that these two irreconcilable positions have found an audience but I challenge the two positions for failing to take into account the many attributes that unite both human beings and non-human animals in the ‘state of creation’ and for preferring to concentrate only on those attributes which separate them such as *reason* and *sentience*. First, I argue that reason is just but one of the ‘gifts of creation’ and cannot be used as a criterion to define moral status and thereby give human beings intrinsic value over and above other creatures. Other ‘gifts of creation’ also matter such as instinctive

ability which non-human beings such as animals and plants possess and these must also be considered in the process of formulating our moral obligations.

Second, I argue that the sentience argument does not give us any solace morally speaking as it leaves out other creatures and as it fails to notice the importance of the degrees of sentience which L. Wayne Sumner identifies and discusses which gives human beings higher sentience and other animals lower sentience. Having looked at all these submissions, I argue that the only reconciliatory position to adopt is one that takes us back to the 'state of creation' to see whether or not conventional morality based on reason is among the 'gifts of creation' or whether or not it is among the roots all beings share.

Moral Status: A Definition

It is crucial to begin this section by defining 'moral status' before considering arguments for establishing its criteria. To begin with, almost all traditional and modern philosophers from Socrates to Kant affirm that reason is the key defining feature of moral status. According to 'reason-based moral status' advocates, the attributes of human beings from which moral status arises have been described as the inner consciousness of a free will (Saint Augustine); the grasp by human reason, of the binding character of moral law (Saint Thomas); the self-conscious participation of human beings in an objective ethical order (Hegel); human membership in an organic moral community (Bradley) and most influentially, the emphasis on the universal human possession of a uniquely moral will and the autonomy its use entails (Kant).²

² This is a well established tradition which is also called anthropocentrism. This tradition holds that only reason define moral status (See St. Augustine's *Confessions*, book 7; St Thomas' *Summa Theologica*; Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*; Bradley's *Why Should I be Moral*, and Kant's *Fundamental principles of the Metaphysic of Morals*).

The argument continues, humans confront choices that are purely moral; humans – but certainly not dogs or mice – lay down moral laws, for others and for themselves, they are self-legislative or morally autonomous. Animals (that is, non human animals, in the ordinary sense of that word) on the other hand, lack this capacity for free moral judgment. They are not beings of a kind capable of exercising or responding to moral claims and hence have no status morally speaking (Mappes and Zembaty, 1997: 459). While this position has found an audience, it is critical to proffer a counter argument such as the argument from sentience which seeks to elevate non-human animals on the moral radar. This argument has many defenders which include among others Peter Singer, Stephen Clark and Tom Regan.

While sentientism has many versions, in this treatise, I make use of Singer’s version – as a matter of strategy – to defend the position that all beings are equal in the ‘state of creation’ and hence have moral status which also go beyond the stipulations of mere reason and the feeling of pain and experience of pleasure. This should not be interpreted to mean that I have no respect for the arguments as presented by both Clark and Regan; for the impact of their claims cannot be underestimated. It is just that for purposes of this article I am more comfortable with using Singer’s sentience argument although every now and then I make reference to Regan. That said, I begin by examining Singer’s sentience argument.

Singer – a neo-Benthamite utilitarian – departs from the established anthropocentric tradition by naming ‘sentience’ as the key feature of moral status. To make his case very clear, Singer defines ‘sentience’ as the capacity to feel pain and experience pleasure. To buttress the foregoing, Singer puts emphasis on the fact that we should be morally concerned about non-human animals or at least all non-human animals capable of conscious experiences

such as pain and pleasure (Singer, 1995: 79). His major concern is that it is morally wrong to inflict pain to sentient beings. Singer maintains that because both human beings and other animals have this capacity, they must therefore be considered equally in the process of formulating our moral obligations.³

In any case, pain is pain no matter who feels it, so long as a being is sentient...it has an interest in not feeling pain and its interest provides moral agents with prima facie reasons for acting. Sentience then is sufficient to give moral status (Steinbock, 1992: 24). For Singer, species membership *alone* do not provide adequate grounds for treating the moral interests of other beings any differently from those of human beings (Behrens, 2009: 276).⁴ T.N Scanlon (1998: 181) supports this view by pointing out that:

Given the plausible assumption that responding appropriately to the value of other creatures is part of morality in the broad sense; this accounts for the intuition that it is a serious moral failure to be indifferent to the suffering of non-human animals and hence morally wrong in the broad sense of that term to cause them pain without moral justification.

What is clear for both Singer and Scanlon is the utilitarian thinking that both human beings and non-human beings particularly animals have interests which are linked to maximizing pleasure and minimizing pain and hence must be considered equally. Morally relevant similarities exist between human beings and non-human animals which are linked to their natures. Animals can suffer, as Jeremy Bentham said; they have interests; what we do to them

³ It is not clear whether Singer believes that both human beings and other animals are equal in the strictest sense of the word, but what is clear in his tone is that the ill-treatment of other animals by human beings cannot be tolerated as these beings (animals) have interests which should also be respected. Unlike human beings, pigs have no interest in voting for democracy but they have interest in avoiding suffering and hence they deserve better treatment just as human beings deserve better treatment.

⁴ I must admit that without the insights of Kevin Behrens (2009) and V.L. J Bogaert (2004) – fellow colleagues in the field of philosophical inquiry and members of the Philosophical Society of Southern Africa (PSSA) just like me, this project could not have been. I am really inspired by Behrens’ statement, “ if there is nothing wrong in harming animals, then my argument fails to get off the ground at all (2009:275). It is the same spirit which has pushed me to write this paper.

matters to them; they can feel pain, fear, anxiety, loneliness, pleasure, boredom and so on (Rollin in Mappes and Zembaty, 1997: 494).

But despite these similarities, both human beings and animals have different ‘gifts of creation’ and hence have different interests in the ‘state of creation’ which are also linked to their natures. I contend that it is these different ‘gifts of creation’ and different interests which should help us understand why it is important to treat them as equals in the moral sphere. Rollin vacillates by observing that human rights protect... the fundamental interests of human beings from cavalier encroachment by the common good – such interests as speech, assembly, belief, property, freedom from torture and so forth are interests that are of moral concern to human beings. These interests, however, cannot be generalized to exclude other animals when it comes to membership of the moral community which should be based solely on those attributes of creation which unite than separate human beings from other animals.

That being the case, it is also critical to note that conscious animals also have fundamental interests arising out of their biologically given natures (or *teloi*), the infringement upon which matters greatly to them and the fulfillment of which is central to their lives (1997:495). Thus, while the infringement of human rights as defined by the species *Homo sapiens* matters to humans, the infringement of the fundamental interests of non-human animals – as defined by their *teloi* – also matters to animals. What stands out clearly is that both human beings and animals have interests which are tied to their ‘gifts of creation,’ and hence they both have intrinsic value.

Against this backdrop, Singer is right to say that interests must be considered equally. As Rollin puts it, moral concern for individual animals follows from the hitherto ignored presence of morally relevant characteristics, primarily sentience in animals (1997:495). But it is not clear from this statement whether sentience means consciousness in which case Singer would find good company. But what is rather clear for Singer is that only sentient beings have intrinsic value and hence have moral status despite the fact that some of their interests are different from those of human beings. Just like Singer, Rollin uses forward-looking theories such as utilitarianism to defend his position.

Singer – feeding his principle of equal consideration into a utilitarian ethical framework – remarks that first of all, there is need to consider the interests of sentient beings equally; and secondly, our obligations should be founded on the aim of bringing about the greatest amount of interest-satisfaction that we can.⁵ Singer equates the human being's discriminatory attitude towards non-human beings (particularly animals) – which he calls speciesism – to racism. In a famous prose he writes:

Racists violate the principle of equality by giving greater weight to the interests of members of their own race when there is a clash between their interests and the interests of those of another race. Racists of European descent typically have not accepted that pain matters as much when it is felt by Africans, for example, as when it is felt by Europeans. Similarly those I would call 'speciesists' give greater weight to the interests of members of their own species when there is a clash between their interests and the interests of those of other species.⁶

While it is important to acknowledge the force behind Singer's sentience argument, especially the equal consideration argument, it is equally important to critically evaluate the moral implications of this argument in as far as the issue of moral status is concerned. For instance, it does not follow from Singer's argument that killing a

⁵ Singer in: Cochrane, A. 2007. Environmental Ethics at mhtml: file://E:\Environmental Ethics [Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy].mht. Accessed 32 February 2009.

⁶ Singer, P. (1993). *Practical Ethics*. New York: Cambridge University Press, p.58

sentient being is morally wrong as long as it is done painlessly.⁷ I consider this to be morally repugnant in the sense that the act of killing is considered by many ethicists to be the height of cruelty when it comes to the treatment of non-human beings by human beings and yet Singer seems not to seriously consider this important aspect.⁸

It would probably be wrong to assume that the definition of sentience can only be limited to the capacity to feel pain and pleasure. Even if it were to be the case, the type of pleasure and pain which human beings would enjoy should be different from the type of pleasure and pain to be experienced by pigs, for instance. The differences can be explained in terms of ‘gifts of creation’ which I shall define and discuss later in this article. This would then mean that the kind of sentience that can be ascribed to human beings would require much more than just having the capacity to enjoy and suffer at the more general level. Wayne Sumner, for instance, has this to say with regard to sentience:

*In the most primitive form it is the ability to experience sensations of pleasure and pain, and thus the ability to enjoy and suffer. It's more developed forms include wants, aims and desires (and thus the ability to be satisfied and frustrated); attitudes, tastes, and values; and moods, emotions, sentiments, and passions.*⁹

It is worth mentioning that sentience, according to Sumner, has varying degrees; that is, at the lowest degree; it has to do with merely experiencing sensations of pleasure and pain. I would say that a being (human or non-human)

⁷ Bogaert, V.L.J. 2004. “Sentience and Moral Standing.” *South African Journal of Philosophy*, 23 (3): 293-301.

⁸ I argue that life gives value, and its absence means absence of value. Singer probably overlooks this point. I take it that pain and pleasure alone cannot give value to a being and unless qualified. So, any act of killing must therefore be morally condemned. There is no doubt that Bogaert is making a crucial point here. But a being does not only need to be alive in order to have moral status, it must also go beyond instinctive ability.

⁹ Sumner’s definition of sentience is clearer and morally relevant than Singer’s characterization (Sumner, W.L. (1997). *A Third Way*. In: *S Dwyer and J. Feinberg (Eds.). The Problem of Abortion*. Belmont: Wards worth Publishing Company, p. 108). By just limiting sentience to mere pleasure and pain I will not hesitate to mention that Singer is probably operating at the level of Epicureanism which the majority of Greek philosophers dismissed as weak philosophy if it was philosophy at all. Epicureanism is the doctrine of Epicurus which places value on sensual enjoyment and a fastidious life of taking pleasure in food, wine et cetera.

just needs to be alive in order to have such experiences. I would further argue that non-human beings are sentient in the *primitive* sense because they have no appreciation of aims and values because of the abstractive nature of these aims and values. In its highest degree; sentience encapsulates wants, aims, desires, attitudes, sentiments, emotions, passions and values. Only human beings have wants, aims and values hence only human beings have *developed* sentience.¹⁰

What does it mean then for this paper, if sentience can be explained in terms of these varying degrees? What are the implications of these varying degrees of sentience as far as Singer's argument is concerned? Responding to these two crucial questions would probably allow me to take this argument to another level, that non-human beings have instrumental value since they are sentient in the *primitive* sense while human beings have intrinsic value since they have *developed* sentience and by taking this position, many would regard me to be a 'reason based moral status theorist,' a school of thought which I do not subscribe to. For many 'reason based moral status theorists,' *intrinsic value* means being an independent moral object, which means the being must have at least a remote potential for intellect and will. *Primitive* sentience does not confer the independence of nature required for moral status to be granted, many reason-based moral status theorists would argue. Against this backdrop, Singer's position is heavily challenged.

If this position is anything to go by, it would be simplistic to include non-human animals in the moral community on the basis of them having only *primitive* sentience. That said, it would probably not be wrong to assume that only *developed* sentience is a passport for moral participation. But this position can be easily refuted, as this would also mean that the mentally retarded have *primitive* sentience and hence should not be members of the moral

¹⁰ Bogaert (2004), p.293-301

community. Attractive as this argument may appear, it creates serious problems because it assumes that mental retardation is a permanent state of affairs and that it begets mental retardation when it comes to procreation and yet many ‘reason-based moral status’ theorists believe that even the mentally retarded have a remote potential for intellect and will and – assuming that they can engage in sexual intercourse – they procreate normal offspring. It would be wrong to deny them moral status. In any case, ‘reason based moral status’ theorists would perhaps argue that if the soul is immortal then mental retardation may not rule out intellectual potential being actualized in an afterlife. Possession of an immortal soul which animals do not have has implications for human moral status. Accordingly, *developed* sentience will always set human beings and other animals apart, so they will say.

Now, if the above point can be granted that human beings have intrinsic value and other animals have not –as critics of the sentient argument would put it – then the human beings’ domineering attitude towards other animals – what Singer calls speciesism – cannot be compared to racism, for racism has to do with one human being exploiting another of different skin pigmentation but the racist and his victim retain the same intrinsic value by virtue of being human beings.¹¹ Other critics of ‘sentience and the argument from equal consideration’ have questioned the whole idea of extending moral status to animals alone as they consider this to be reductionist.

It should be pointed out that our concerns for the environment go beyond merely worrying about a certain group of animals at the expense of others; rather all living beings must be accorded the same kind of status in the ‘state of creation.’ So while Singer’s attempt to argue for the inclusion of zoo animals in the moral community is something very laudable, perhaps he needs to take heed of the criticisms leveled against his theory. But it will be gross naivety

¹¹ In philosophical terms, racism is morally condemned because it does not go along with Kant’s principle of ‘respect for persons.’ I do not know what to say with regard to speciesism, other than that it is also a form of unwarranted discrimination of one species by another.

to fail to appreciate what Singer has done in advocating for the animal liberation discourse in a world driven by anthropocentric thinking.

It is important at this point in time to note that the conflict between the animal liberation view of Singer and other like-minded philosophers and the implications of this to our attitude to predation in nature, for example, has been addressed by a number of philosophers, who have proposed different ways of resolving the issue. Thus, JB Callicott has proposed a hierarchy of value (human beings, then animals, then the wider environment).¹² Regan has proposed animals first and his argument is based on the key premise that animals just like human beings are 'subjects- of- a-life,' that is, they have beliefs, desires, perception, memory, emotions, a sense of future and the ability to initiate action. In short Regan argues that these beings have moral consciousness.¹³ But my interest in this treatise is not to walk the same path that these philosophers have walked for this will be philosophically uninteresting and redundant.

But as I try to come up with my own thought experiment, I do not intend to re-invent the wheel by suggesting that my position is not influenced by those who have come before me. My exposition is that we have to identify and discuss the roots both human beings and non-human animals share in order to successfully come up with a moral criterion that can be used to determine moral status. I argue that this will only be possible if we take these beings back to their 'state of creation' without necessarily having to worry about their differences which can only be explained in terms of 'gifts of creation.' Whichever way one may want to look at it, in the 'state of creation,' there

¹² See Callicott, J.B. (1980). "Animal liberation: A Triangular Affair," *Environmental Ethics*, Vol. 2, pp.311-328

¹³ Regan, T. (2004). *The Case for Animal Rights*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

are certain roots which both human beings and other animals share which should help confer moral status to both humans and other animals. In the next section, I set out to identify and discuss these roots.

Moral Status in the ‘State of Creation’

It is one thing to admit that only persons can reason and participate in the moral community, and quite another to place men at the centre of the environment. That granted, I argue that, the debate on whether or not non-human beings have moral status cannot be settled by merely reducing everything to reason and sentience. In any case ‘moral status’ is just one criterion among many. There is need, therefore, to consider other criteria without necessarily charging that these criteria are not subject to criticism. I consider the argument from ‘the state of creation’ as sound and appealing to serve our purposes in this regard. But how does this argument proceed? It proceeds thus; all living beings in this world are equal in the sense that they are products of the creator, God. It is because of this criterion that no being should be seen as more special than the other animals when we set out to formulate our moral obligations.

Natural endowments such as reason and instinctive ability cannot be used to differentiate species as these are mere ‘gifts of creation.’ That a donkey is not rational should not be seen as a deficiency or weakness on its part which should warrant ill-treatment from rational beings by excluding it from the moral community. As I indicated earlier, this point prompts me to identify and discuss the roots all beings share in the universe in order to show that human beings and other animals deserve equal treatment morally speaking. To exclude the donkey from the moral community because it does not have the faculty of reason which is needed to define humanity and hence moral status; is similar to not giving someone a position as an Ethics teacher because he or she is physically challenged? A donkey – despite not having the faculty of reason – also participates in God’s natural order or in the ‘state of

creation,' just as a physically challenged person – despite being physically handicapped – is capable of instructing in Ethics.

First, human beings and non-human beings should co-exist in the state of creation and this existence should not be premised on the idea of 'reason-based moral status' because human beings, as 'plain citizens' in the state of creation... have a temporary existence just like non-human living beings. This temporary existence in the 'state of creation' allows us to conclude that nothing in this universe which has a life-span is free and hence has superior moral status when compared to other beings of equal measure. Since life-span is a question of fate, I put it that all beings with a life-span are of equal moral importance. All beings – human and non-human – are answerable to their creator who I regard as perfect and everlasting. Aristotle calls this creator, the uncaused causer and St. Thomas Aquinas calls him the unmoved mover. I contend that the human beings' domineering attitude towards the environment and its contents –on the basis of 'reason-based moral status' – therefore, has no moral justification.

I do not intend to dismiss the anthropocentric view that human beings are rational and other animals are not, for I regard these as nuances that can be explained in terms of 'gifts of creation' which I mentioned earlier on. My point is that granted as it is that human beings are rational, it is my postulation that such rationality cannot be used to give human beings intrinsic value over and above other animals because 'reason-based moral status' is socially constructed and that human beings construct such concepts without the input of other stakeholders such as non-human animals.

So, whether or not human beings are rational and therefore moral is not the argument I wish to pursue in this article as this seems, to me, to be an argument based on unjustifiable species discrimination. The mere fact that other

animals lack rationality is not a relevant factor when it comes to the formulation of our moral obligations. What is morally relevant is the fact that all living beings have a life-span, which can be used as a relevant factor because it is an attribute which all living beings share. I also do not intend to dismiss Singer's sentience criterion that animals should be accorded the same status as other animals (though I have problems with some of his premises) but rather to build on it so as to defend the position that the attributes of pleasure and pain that he uses to give non-human beings moral status are attributes that define both human beings and other animals in 'the state of creation.'

This is to say that the presence of life in both human beings and other animals give them experiences of pleasure and suffering and without life such experiences are not possible. So, whichever way one may want to look at it, life-span determines whether a being remains sentient or not. Against this background, it should be noted that although human beings have *developed* sentience as put by Sumner, they still experience pleasure and pain just like non-human beings and they cannot be justified in taming the environment for their own benefit because pleasure and pain cease when they die. On the basis of this premise, it is logical to conclude that human beings have no authority and hence no right to dominate other species since death equalizes all living beings whether human or non-human. Moral status should therefore be granted based on the mere fact that both human beings other animals are equal as spatio-temporal beings in the 'state of creation.'

Second, in terms of 'species' and 'genus' specifications; both human beings and non-human beings belong to the universal class of 'animals.' It is perhaps crucial at this stage to trace the roots of the word 'animal' back to the Greeks, particularly to Aristotle to determine its real meaning. In *The Politics*, Aristotle defines an 'animal' as something that feeds itself and is sensitive and self moving; to define an animal we need to define its parts and the

functions of its parts such as nutritive function and its chewing and digestive ability (which parts themselves have functions).¹⁴ There are three distinct features which all animals share and these are: life, sensation and voluntary motion. These can be distinguished from a plant which is organized and has life, but apparently has no sensation and no voluntary motion (Kirkpatrick, 1983:46).

By 'life' is meant that both human beings and non-human living beings have breath which unites their bodies to their souls. 'Sensation' means that as they respond to the call of nature, both human beings other animals use senses of sight, hearing, touch and smell and 'voluntary motion' means that they can move from one point to the other without having to be fixed at a particular place. But while both human beings and non-human living beings enjoy these freedoms, they remain fated as subjects- of- a-life-span.

But it is important to observe that they are possible variations as Aristotle put it, which variations yield to the various kinds of animals. Gotthelf explains these variations in terms of what he refer to as 'the givens' (and which I call 'gifts of creation'). To these, Gotthelf argues that we must add the *bioi* of the animals, that is, whether they are marsh animals or water animals and what they habitually eat.¹⁵ In this article, I take Gotthelf's argument to another level by pointing out that the *bioi* defines all living beings in 'the state of creation' – including human beings and that 'the gifts of creation' only differentiates species in terms of biological and not natural hierarchy.

It is these 'gifts of creation' which allows lions to hunt and eat prey and which also allows human beings to speak and reason. It is also the same 'gifts of creation' which allow nocturnal creatures to be active at night and rest

¹⁴ Westra, L and Robinson, T. 1997. *The Greeks and the Environment*. Lanham: Rowan and Littlefield Publishers, p.101

¹⁵ See Westra and Robinson (1997), p.101

during the day. ‘Gifts of creation’ also allow cheetahs to run faster than any other animal. But when all have been said and done, it cannot be successfully argued that these ‘gifts of creation’ should advantage other beings in terms of moral status while disadvantaging others. As I noted earlier, if anything, these variations should just be a matter of nuances.

In any case, all living beings seem to have the same origins if we go by evolutionary theorists like Charles Darwin who do not believe in what I would call the ‘theology of creation’ which names God as the creator and arbiter of both human beings and other creatures in the entire universe. It has been urged by evolutionary theorists that a human being belongs to the family of Apes known as *Hominidae* together with Chimpanzees and Gorillas. Research has shown that both human beings and Chimpanzees can be traced back to a common ancestor in terms of their genetic makeup and other such characteristics. As M Goodman, 1963 and C.G Sibley, 1984 remark:

Evidence that the Chimpanzee has more recent common ancestry with man and Gorilla... is furnished by the cross-reactions of anti-serum to Chimpanzee serum. Besides, D.N.A cross hybridization has provided a tool for comparing the genetic makeup of humans and African Apes and has provided strong evidence to support the theory that Chimpanzees are humans’ closest relative. In fact, humans share 98, 4 percent of their D.N.A with Chimpanzees and differ by only 1, 6 percent.^{16,17}

Based on the above features of animality, as prescribed by Aristotle, Goodman and Sibley, there can be no doubt that human beings, like non-human living beings, also possess the same genetic features; the only difference being that the former can speak, reason and put things to perspective and the latter cannot. But it will be gross unfairness to differentiate species on the basis of speech and reason, attributes which are peculiar only to human beings and not applicable to other species. Doing so will be tantamount to undermining ‘the state of creation’ which allows for

¹⁶ Goodman, M et al. (1990). “D.N.A Evidence on Primate Phylogeny.” *American Journal of Physical Anthropology*, 94 (1): 3-24

¹⁷ Sibley, C.G, and Ahlquist, J.E. (1984). “The Phylogeny of the Hominoid Primates, as indicated by D.N.A – D.N.A Hybridization,” *Journal of Molecular Evolution*, 20: 2-15

differences in terms of ‘gifts of creation’ but not in terms of equal moral status. It would not be a far-fetched idea to argue that both a chimpanzee and a mentally retarded person have *developed* sentience and hence a remote potential for intellect and will which – according to ‘reason-based moral status’ theorists – are needed for the conferment of moral status.

The mere fact that human beings have no control over their fate – in terms of the *bioi* – in the same manner as other animals also have no control over their existence – in terms of their *teloi* – allows me to conclude that all beings are equal in ‘the state of creation.’ But to argue along these lines is not to suppose that only the *bioi* and *teloi* give all beings equal moral status and that reason plays second fiddle in ‘the state of creation.’ I do recognize the role that reason plays as a ‘gift of creation’ but I have serious problems when it becomes the only criterion to be used to define moral status at the expense of other criteria such as sentience and instinctive ability.

Third, as creatures of flesh and blood, both human beings and non-human beings are part of nature; they are not separated from it as nature determines their well-being. For instance, laws of nature (physical or moral) make it impossible for human beings to survive in water bodies such as seas and oceans while fish and crocodiles can. What then can give human beings special status in the universe if they cannot naturally determine their fate? Are we not, therefore, justified in concluding that their moral status can only be defined as spatio-temporal? If this point can be granted, then wouldn’t it follow, therefore, that both human beings and non-human living beings are equal?

Fourth, sentience – which Singer uses to argue for animal liberation and rights – can only be explained by the presence of the brain function in both human beings and non-human animals in the ‘state of creation.’ In higher

mammals, the brain hemispheres reach their maximum size (with sulci and gyri to accommodate the expansion of the brain's volume inside of the skull). According to Lazorthes (1999: 99), the importance of the size of the frontal lobes and their late appearance in evolution as well as in the intra-uterine development of the human fetus suggests that they are the sites of intelligence, although it is not enough to possess them to be able to think. Baron-Cohen (1999:6) says the same about apes when he argues thus, 'Animals have clever brains, but blank minds. They receive sensory inputs but their minds are not conscious of any accompanying sensation. They go about their lives deeply ignorant of an inner explanation for their own behavior.'

What is important for me is not that animals have blank minds, but rather that they cannot explain their own behavior in a way we human beings will understand because they cannot speak as we do. It is wrong, therefore, to assume that animals have blank minds if we cannot account for the presence of the brain in them in the first place. Notwithstanding all these variations, non-human animals by virtue of having the brains have the potential to behave like human beings since these two belong to the family of primates. This would then lead to the satisfactory rendering that both human beings and other animals are equal in the 'state of creation' and hence have equal moral status.

Conclusion

The article revisited familiar debates in environmental ethics with a view to see how the relationship between human beings, persons and other beings in the environment could be improved. 'Reason based moral status,' the argument from sentience by Singer and the argument from the 'state of creation' formed the core of this discussion. The article noted that neither anthropocentrism nor the argument from equal consideration could settle the issue of

moral status and so there was need to consider other criteria that can put human beings, persons and other beings on equal footing.

The article proposed the argument from the 'state of creation,' that is, to say the relationship between human beings and other animals in the environment was supposed to be based on the fact that all beings were temporary and sooner or later they will disappear and that they shared features of animality such as life, sensation and voluntary motion. The variations in terms of gifts of creation was just a matter of nuances, otherwise, all beings were related more by their areas of commonality than by their areas of divergence. The issue of moral status was to be understood in the context of these areas of commonality than only the aspects of rationality and sentience.

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