

A Brief Discussion of Peter Singer's Vegetarianism

Introduction

The notions of ‘eating’ and ‘ethics’ have always been interlinked: Socrates, in Plato’s Republic, advocates a diet of salt, olives, cheese, vegetables, figs for desert, and wine in moderation, so that a ‘peaceful and healthy life’ can be lived;¹ and some indigenous hunter-gathers performed ‘rituals in which they ask forgiveness of the animals they have killed.’² One could argue that today one is so far removed from one’s food source that one does not consider the welfare of the animals that one eats. The rise of agribusiness and supermarkets has resulted in the emergence of factory farms.³ Although a chicken battery farm may reduce the average cost of eggs, the conditions for the chickens concerned are far from ideal.⁴ John Webster, professor of Veterinary science at the University of Bristol, considers industrial chicken production as, ‘in both magnitude and severity, the single most, severe, systematic example of man’s inhumanity to another sentient animal.’⁵

This has caused some ethicists to defend the rights of animals, and while they have approached the subject from different points of departure they have tended to arrive at the same conclusion: the ‘treatment of animals by western societies... is little short, and sometimes nothing short, of criminal.’⁶ Peter Singer’s *Animal Liberation* is widely considered to have ‘galvanised contemporary enthusiasm in topics with a considerable history but, until then, a low profile.’⁷ By expounding his notion of ‘speciesism,’ Singer argues that one has a moral obligation to become a vegetarian, he writes: ‘until we boycott meat, and all other products of animal factories, we are...contributing to the continued existence, prosperity, and growth of factory farming and all the other cruel practices used in rearing animals for food.’⁸ Vegetarianism, for the purposes of this paper, can therefore be defined as the boycott of all meat and foodstuffs that come from animals that have a capacity to suffer.

To argue that the application of Singer’s moral vegetarianism is reasonable, one must first demonstrate that his notion of ‘speciesism’ is consistent and can withstand criticism. Furthermore, it ought to be ascertained if the species included in Singer’s Speciesism do possess a capacity to suffer. During the course of this paper, I will argue that Singer’s argument can withstand criticism, and that mammals and birds do have a capacity to suffer. However, I will also argue that his argument goes too far insofar as it attempts to extend moral consideration to fish. I will thus outline Singer’s notion of ‘speciesism,’ under

¹ Plato, *Republic*, Book II, p.63

² Singer, P., (2006), *Eating: What we Eat and Why it Matters*, p.1

³ Mason, J., (1985), *Brave New Farm?* in: Singer, P. (ed.), *In Defence of Animals*, p.90

⁴ Mason, J., (1985), *Brave New Farm?* in: Singer, P. (ed.), *In Defence of Animals*, p.90-107

⁵ Webster, J., (1995), *Animal Welfare: A Cool Eye Towards Eden*, p.156

⁶ Leahy, M.P.T., (1991), *Against Liberation: Putting Animals in Perspective*, p.2

⁷ Leahy, M.P.T., (1991), *Against Liberation: Putting Animals in Perspective*, p.2

⁸ Singer, P., (1990), *Animal Liberation*, p.162

the assumption that each premise of his argument is sound, and demonstrate that it withstands the criticism of Alward's Naïve Argument against Moral Vegetarianism. I will then examine the claim that mammals and birds do possess a capacity to suffer, and I will pay particular attention to the distinction between pain-related responses and a conscious experience of pain, alongside the role of language in demonstrating consciousness. Finally, I will argue that Singer goes too far in extending moral consideration to fish. I will argue that fish 'lack the essential brain region or any functional equivalent, making it untenable that they can experience pain.'⁹ Nevertheless, although it is not morally wrong to eat fish, I will argue that it should be avoided due to wider environmental considerations.

Speciesism Vs The Naive Argument against Moral Vegetarianism.

To understand Singer's notion of 'speciesism,' one must first explore the distinction between 'equal treatment' and 'equal consideration.' For Singer, the notion of 'equal treatment' is equivalent to the concept of 'equal rights.' He claims that the rights between humans and non-humans do not have to be the same, and that this is also the case for men and women: humans and non-humans are inherently different, as are men and women. For instance, while women have the right to have an abortion on request it is unreasonable to extend this particular right to men, as they are unable to conceive children. Conversely, men and women ought to have the right to vote because both genders possess the mental capacity to make rational decisions about the future.¹⁰ For Singer, 'the basic principle of equality does not require equal or identical treatment; it requires identical consideration.'¹¹ Indeed, as equality is a moral idea and not an assertion of fact, it is nonsensical to claim that a 'factual difference in ability between two people justifies any difference in the amount of consideration we give to their needs and interests.'¹²

As the tenet of the 'equality of human beings' is not a description of an alleged actual equality among humans: it is a prescription of how we should treat human beings'¹³, one's concern and eagerness to consider the interests of others should not depend on the intellect, moral capacity or physical strength of that being. However, what one does to address those concerns may vary according to the characteristics of those affected: concern for the well-being of the homeless may require one to secure suitable accommodation and employment, alongside physical and emotional support, for those affected by homelessness; concern for the well-being of cows may require one to ensure that they have enough room

⁹ Rose, J.D, (2002), *The Neurobehavioral Nature of Fishes and the Question of Awareness and Pain*, in: *Reviews in Fisheries Science*, Vol. 10, No.1, p.1

¹⁰ Singer, P., (1990), *Animal Liberation*, pp.1-2

¹¹ Singer, P., (1990), *Animal Liberation*, p.2

¹² Singer, P., (1990), *Animal Liberation*, p.5

¹³ Singer, P., (1990), *Animal Liberation*, p.5

to move around freely, are with other cows and are adequately fed.¹⁴ Nevertheless, as Singer considers ‘the greatest happiness of the greatest number’ to be the ‘measure of right and wrong,’ a ‘beings capacity for suffering and enjoyment is a prerequisite for having interests at all.’¹⁵ It is precisely because non-humans, especially mammals and birds, possess such a capacity that equality should be extended to them,¹⁶ and if an animal is suffering then one has a moral obligation to minimise that suffering so that happiness can be maximised. According to Singer, as it is practically ‘impossible to rear animals for food on a large scale without inflicting considerable suffering,’ it follows that one, morally, ought to become a vegetarian, as this is the only way in which the suffering of these animals can be eradicated. It is when these basic moral considerations are not extended to non-humans that ‘speciesism’ occurs, or as Singer writes: ‘[speciesism] is a prejudice or attitude of bias in favor of the interests of one’s own species and against those members of another species.’¹⁷

Although Singer argues that equality should be extended to non-humans, he does not consider non-human carnivores to be immoral. However, one could argue that as non-human carnivores eat the meat of other beings, which have been killed for the purposes of being eaten, and this is not considered to be immoral, then it follows that a human eating the meat of a non-human for the purpose of being eaten is also not immoral.¹⁸ Alward expounds such an argument in his paper, *The Naïve Argument against Moral Vegetarianism*. He notes that the standard response to the naïve argument is as follows: humans and non-humans are inherently different, and it is these inherent differences that justify it being immoral for humans to eat non-humans for the purposes of eating, and moral for non-humans to eat the meat of other beings. He identifies two justifying inherent differences: first, non-human carnivores, such as lions, do not possess the moral capacity to know that killing another animal is wrong; and secondly, while lions require meat for their survival, humans do not.¹⁹ In response to a lion’s moral capacity, Alward writes: ‘The fact that lions...do not know that eating meat is wrong does not show that it is not wrong for them to do so’;²⁰ all it suggests is that a lion cannot be held morally accountable for eating the meat of another animal. That said, one could argue that even if a lion is not morally accountable for eating the meat of an animal, as the act itself is morally wrong, one has a moral obligation to prevent it from doing so.²¹ Alward addresses the second refutation by comparing a lion to an ‘innocent person A who has a gun pointed at

¹⁴ Singer, P., (1990), *Animal Liberation*, p.5

¹⁵ Burns, J.H., (2005), ‘*Happiness and Utility: Jeremy Bentham’s Equation*’, in: *Utilitas*, Vol. 17, No. 1, p.46

¹⁶ Singer, P., (1990), *Animal Liberation*, p.5

¹⁷ Singer, P., (1990), *Animal Liberation*, p.6

¹⁸ Alward, P., (2000), ‘*The Naïve Argument against Moral Vegetarianism*,’ in: *Environmental Values*, Vol.9, No.1, p.82

¹⁹ Alward, P., (2000), ‘*The Naïve Argument against Moral Vegetarianism*,’ in: *Environmental Values*, Vol.9, No.1, p.83

²⁰ Alward, P., (2000), ‘*The Naïve Argument against Moral Vegetarianism*,’ in: *Environmental Values*, Vol.9, No.1, p.83

²¹ Alward, P., (2000), ‘*The Naïve Argument against Moral Vegetarianism*,’ in: *Environmental Values*, Vol.9, No.1, p.83

her head and will be killed unless she kills someone else, B.’²² As the only way that A can save her own life is to kill B, and both A and B are innocent, A killing B is therefore morally acceptable. However, he argues that this case is unlike that of the lion, as it continually eats meat to survive throughout its life. Consequently, the outcome in which ‘A kills B, C, D and E, and so on, is morally worse than that in which A is killed by the gunman, despite her innocence.’ As Singer considers the correct course of action to minimise the suffering of the greatest number,²³ Alward concludes that one has a moral obligation to prevent lions from eating meat. Furthermore, as this would lead to their starvation, if an alternative food source could not be found, one would be obligated to kill them painlessly in order to avoid being cruel.²⁴

Although one could argue that Alward’s analogy of the gunman is inappropriate when comparing humans and lions, I would argue that Alward’s formulation of the moral vegetarian thesis is problematic, he writes: ‘Eating the meat of an animal with properties X,Y,Z, ... that was killed for the purpose of being eaten is morally wrong.’²⁵ Alward therefore implies that it is always wrong for a human to eat the meat of a non-human, but many moral vegetarians would deny this.²⁶ Singer, for instance, argues that eating meat is trivial because humans have an alternative food source.²⁷ Implicit within his argument, therefore, is the notion that if humans had to eat meat to survive then although the act of eating meat would be regrettable, it would not be immoral as the reasons for doing so are weighty.²⁸ As a human in this situation would not be prevented from eating meat, the same must also be said of non-humans who are in the same situation.²⁹ I thus consider Alward’s argument to be flawed because he fails to recognise the importance of triviality. Furthermore, Alward’s argument is also inadequate as it does not directly explore the problems inherent in Singer’s claim that non-humans have the capacity to suffer. This idea is fundamental to speciesism as Singer maintains that a ‘being’s capacity for suffering and enjoyment is a prerequisite for having interests

²² Alward, P., (2000), ‘*The Naïve Argument against Moral Vegetarianism*,’ in: *Environmental Values*, Vol.9, No.1, p.84

²³ Alward, P., (2000), ‘*The Naïve Argument against Moral Vegetarianism*,’ in: *Environmental Values*, Vol.9, No.1, p.83

²⁴ Benatar, D., (2001), ‘*Why the Naïve Argument against Moral Vegetarianism Really is Naïve*, in: *Environmental Values*, Vol.10, No.1, p.105

²⁵ Benatar, D., (2001), ‘*Why the Naïve Argument against Moral Vegetarianism Really is Naïve*, in: *Environmental Values*, Vol.10, No.1, pp.106-108

- Alward, P., (2000), ‘*The Naïve Argument against Moral Vegetarianism*,’ in *Environmental Values*, Vol.9, No.1, p.83

²⁶ Benatar, D., (2001), ‘*Why the Naïve Argument against Moral Vegetarianism Really is Naïve*, in: *Environmental Values*, Vol.10, No.1, p.106

²⁷ Benatar, D., (2001), ‘*Why the Naïve Argument against Moral Vegetarianism Really is Naïve*, in: *Environmental Values*, Vol.10, No.1, p.106

- Singer, P., (1990), *Animal Liberation*, p.9

²⁸ Benatar, D., (2001), ‘*Why the Naïve Argument against Moral Vegetarianism Really is Naïve*, in: *Environmental Values*, Vol.10, No.1, p.106

²⁹ Benatar, D., (2001), ‘*Why the Naïve Argument against Moral Vegetarianism Really is Naïve*, in: *Environmental Values*, Vol.10, No.1, p.106

at all.³⁰ Consequently, if non-humans do not have the capacity to suffer then one could argue that moral vegetarianism is unreasonable.

Suffering and Self-Awareness

The notion of suffering is problematic as it is a ‘mental event’ and cannot, therefore, be observed. Although suffering is distinct from pain, as the former can occur without the latter, it is useful to consider pain because it is a mental event. Although the observation that one feels pain just as oneself does is an inference, it is reasonable, as it is based on observations of one’s behavior in situations in which oneself would feel pain.³¹ As such, one can argue that the same observation can be made for non-humans that are closely related, such as mammals and birds. Singer argues that these species do have a capacity to feel pain, as their nervous systems are almost physiologically identical to humans. Like humans, their nervous systems are not artificial, and share a ‘common origin and evolutionary function.’³² This is why the behavior and physiological reactions of non-humans in situations where pain arises are similar to that of humans.³³

However, James Rose, Professor of Zoology and Physiology at Wyoming University, argues that human pain ‘is a complex end result of nociception and consciousness-dependent processes.’³⁴ Nociception alone does not cause pain because people who sustain serious injuries in warfare, for instance, do not always ‘report pain or report it differently than the extent of an injury would suggest.’³⁵ For a human to consciously experience pain, therefore, activity must take place in one’s central nervous system, and one’s response to pain must be consciously mediated; high-level brain function must also occur.³⁶ That said, the examples that Singer states as being indications of pain in animals, such as ‘writhing, facial contortions, moaning, yelping, ... [and] attempts to avoid the source of pain,’ do not mean that pain is being consciously experienced because such responses could be due to ‘unconscious nocifensive responses,’ which do not depend on a ‘consciously mediated response.’³⁷

³⁰ Singer, P., (1990), *Animal Liberation*, p.5

³¹ Singer, P., (1990), *Animal Liberation*, p.5

³² Singer, P., (1990), *Animal Liberation*, p.11

³³ Singer, P., (1990), *Animal Liberation*, p.11

³⁴ Rose, J.D., & Woodbury, C.J., (2008), ‘*Animal Models of Nociception and Pain*,’ in: Conn, P.M. (ed.), *Sourcebook of Models for Biomedical Research*, p.333

- Nociception can be defined as ‘the afferent activity produced in the peripheral and central nervous system by stimuli that have the potential to damage tissue. See, Misery, L., (2010), *Pruritus, Pain and Other Abnormal Skin Sensations*, in: Misery, L. & Ständer, S. (eds.), *Pruritus*, p.62

³⁵ Rose, J.D., & Woodbury, C.J., (2008), ‘*Animal Models of Nociception and Pain*,’ in: Conn, P.M. (ed.), *Sourcebook of Models for Biomedical Research*, p.334

³⁶ Rose, J.D., & Woodbury, C.J., (2008), ‘*Animal Models of Nociception and Pain*,’ in: Conn, P.M. (ed.), *Sourcebook of Models for Biomedical Research*, p.335

³⁷ Singer, P., (1990), *Animal Liberation*, p.11

This idea is also implicit in the work of the philosopher Renes Descartes. Renes Descartes considers animals to be ‘automata,’ and while he does not deny animals life and sensation, he does argue that they are devoid of all consciousness.³⁸ Descartes makes a distinction between three ‘grades’ of sensation, and although the first grade is common to both animals and humans, the other two are not present in animals, as they require consciousness. A first grade sensation can be applied to any being that possesses a sensory organ that reacts to external stimuli. For instance, a dog can see because it has eyes that react to light, which causes the sensation of sight. This type of sensation does not imply that consciousness is present, as Descartes implies that a first grade sensation occurs ‘without “the mind’s union with the corporeal organ affected.”’³⁹ Indeed, as animals are unable to demonstrate certain behaviors that require consciousness, like language, he considers them to be unconscious beings, he writes: ‘the reason why animals do not speak as we do is not that they lack the organs but that they have no thoughts.’⁴⁰

Studies involving chimpanzees that have learned sign language have challenged Descartes’ claim. One chimpanzee in particular, Nim, learned over four hundred words, including ‘finish, berry, hello, sleep, chair and play.’⁴¹ Although this may suggest that chimpanzees are language-users, unlike humans Nim never ‘reached a point where he regularly extended the length of his sentences.’⁴² Leahy, in his *Against Liberation*, makes a similar observation and argues that chimpanzees never progress beyond the ‘holophrastic speech’, and thus their behavior does not constitute language because there is no syntax.⁴³ Indeed, it is researchers that interpret the holophrastic ‘Allgone Dada’ and ‘No play’ to be ‘forms of the cognate assertions “I am not playing” and “I know my father has left.”’⁴⁴ As a result, such case studies do not provide evidence of self-consciousness in animals.

Leahy’s argument is problematic as it implies that children, before they reach an age when they can speak, must also be unaware of anything. This appears unlikely because a young child must be conscious of objects and actions otherwise they would not be able to learn the relevant words and phrases which leads to the formulation of language.⁴⁵ Consequently, whilst I acknowledge that animals only possess a limited ability to formulate language, the fact they are able to learn words and phrases at all ‘requires

- Rose, J.D., & Woodbury, C.J., (2008), ‘*Animal Models of Nociception and Pain*,’ in: Conn, P.M. (ed.), *Sourcebook of Models for Biomedical Research*, p.334

³⁸ Kenny, A., (1968), *Descartes: A Study of His Philosophy*, p.66

³⁹ Regan, T., (1983), *The Case For Animal Rights*, p.4

⁴⁰ Kenny, A., (1968), *Descartes: A Study of His Philosophy*, pp.63-64

⁴¹ Regan, T., (1983), *The Case For Animal Rights*, p.12

⁴² Regan, T., (1983), *The Case For Animal Rights*, p.13

⁴³ Leahy, M.P.T., (1991), *Against Liberation: Putting Animals in Perspective*, p.32

⁴⁴ Leahy, M.P.T., (1991), *Against Liberation: Putting Animals in Perspective*, p.32

⁴⁵ Regan, T., (1983), *The Case For Animal Rights*, p.16

conscious reception,' and are thus conscious beings.⁴⁶ I would also argue that such an assertion is strengthened by scientific evidence that mammals do possess the necessary brain structure to experience pain in a similar way to humans.⁴⁷ Such evidence has led to the conclusion that although 'fishes and amphibians are very unlikely to have a capacity for conscious pain experience,' this is not the case for mammals and birds,⁴⁸ although the degree to which mammals consciously experience pain is still unclear.⁴⁹

Can Fish Feel Pain?

While I would argue that Singer's speciesism can be reasonably applied to mammals and birds, I do consider his claims to go too far in arguing that moral consideration should be extended to fish. For Singer, fish should not be eaten due to their capacity to suffer and because of the wider environmental implications of commercial fishing.⁵⁰ With regards to a fish's capacity to suffer, Singer's argument appears to be anthropomorphic: 'fish...show most of the pain behavior that mammals do.'⁵¹ As I have already stated behavioral responses alone do not constitute a conscious experience of pain, as they can be due to 'unconscious nocifensive responses' that do not depend on a 'consciously mediated response.'⁵² Singer then suggests that there is scientific evidence to support his assertion that fish have the capacity to suffer, which has led scientists to conclude 'unequivocally that the evidence for pain in fish is as strong as the evidence for pain in other vertebrate animals.'⁵³ Singers argument, however, omits the fact that studies have generally focused on 'behavior reactivity to injurious or presumed noxious stimuli, [which] has been taken as prima facie evidence of conscious pain experience.'⁵⁴ Lynne Sneddon's paper is symptomatic of studies into the pain potential of fish, as it only takes into account pain-related behavior and ignores the evidence that behavioral responses are separate from a psychological experience of pain.⁵⁵ By comparing the pain-related behavior of rainbow trout before and after administering morphine,

⁴⁶ Regan, T., (1983), *The Case For Animal Rights*, p.16

⁴⁷ Rose, J.D., & Woodbury, C.J., (2008), 'Animal Models of Nociception and Pain,' in: Conn, P.M. (ed.), *Sourcebook of Models for Biomedical Research*, p.334

⁴⁸ Rose, J.D., & Woodbury, C.J., (2008), 'Animal Models of Nociception and Pain,' in: Conn, P.M. (ed.), *Sourcebook of Models for Biomedical Research*, p.335

⁴⁹ Rose, J.D., & Woodbury, C.J., (2008), 'Animal Models of Nociception and Pain,' in: Conn, P.M. (ed.), *Sourcebook of Models for Biomedical Research*, p.335

⁵⁰ Singer, P., (1990), *Animal Liberation*, p.172

⁵¹ Singer, P., (1990), *Animal Liberation*, p.172

⁵² Singer, P., (1990), *Animal Liberation*, p.11

- Rose, J.D., & Woodbury, C.J., (2008), 'Animal Models of Nociception and Pain,' in: Conn, P.M. (ed.), *Sourcebook of Models for Biomedical Research*, p.334

⁵³ Singer, P., (1990), *Animal Liberation*, p.172

⁵⁴ Singer, P., (1990), *Animal Liberation*, p.172

Rose, J.D., (2002), *The Neurobehavioral Nature of Fishes and the Question of Awareness and Pain*, in: *Reviews in Fisheries Science*, Vol. 10, No.1, p.32

⁵⁵ Rose, J.D., (2002), *The Neurobehavioral Nature of Fishes and the Question of Awareness and Pain*, in: *Reviews in Fisheries Science*, Vol. 10, No.1, p.1

she concludes that there is pain potential in fish because pain-related behavior is reduced after administering morphine.⁵⁶ I would disagree with Sneddon's conclusion as there is evidence to suggest that fish 'lack the essential brain region or any functional equivalent, making it untenable that they can experience pain.'⁵⁷ As the evolutionary history of mammals and fish diverged approximately 400 million years ago, although both species share a similar brainstem, the 'massive expansion of the cerebral hemispheres and development of the neocortex in mammals, has not occurred in fish.'⁵⁸ This is significant as the 'massively expanded neocortex in humans appears to be the foundation of our consciousness.'⁵⁹ Although fish 'display robust, non-conscious, physiological stress responses to noxious stimuli,' pain is not consciously experienced.⁶⁰ A fish can therefore be compared to a decapitated chicken: while the chicken's bodies will still move and react as though the chicken is alive, the chicken will not feel any pain as the brain is not attached to the body. As such, fish do not have a capacity to suffer and thus do not have interests.

Alongside the argument for suffering, Singer also outlines the wider environmental implications of commercial fishing. For instance, 27 million tons of either dead or dying bycatch, species of unwanted marine life that are scooped off the seabed, are thrown back into the sea each year.⁶¹ Moreover, the nets used by the tuna fishing industry kill thousands of dolphins.⁶² Even the farming of salmon has wider environmental implications: the 'water surrounding the sea cages and the seabed become polluted from the concentration of fish feces and food waste that are discharged, untreated, into the sea.'⁶³ Commercial fishing thus seems to damage the fragile ecology of the seabed, consumes more fossil fuel than it produces, kills mammals and birds, and damages local economies that have traditionally relied on fishing as a source of food and income.⁶⁴ There is therefore a social and environmental cost that one must consider when consuming fish. Although I have argued that fish do not suffer as a result of fishing, I would also argue that individuals have a moral responsibility to the environment. This principle has been applied to the business sector: companies have a social responsibility to ensure that environmental damage is rectified. For instance, British Petroleum was forced to spend \$6 billion to clean up the Gulf of

⁵⁶ Sneddon, L.,(2003), *The evidence for pain in fish: the use of morphine as an analgesic*, in: *Applied animal Behavior Science*, Vol. 83, p.153

⁵⁷ Rose, J.D, (2002), *The Neurobehavioral Nature of Fishes and the Question of Awareness and Pain*, in: *Reviews in Fisheries Science*, Vol. 10, No.1, p.1

⁵⁸ Rose, J.D, (2002), *The Neurobehavioral Nature of Fishes and the Question of Awareness and Pain*, in: *Reviews in Fisheries Science*, Vol. 10, No.1, p.27

⁵⁹ Rose, J.D, (2002), *The Neurobehavioral Nature of Fishes and the Question of Awareness and Pain*, in: *Reviews in Fisheries Science*, Vol. 10, No.1, p.10

⁶⁰ Rose, J.D, (2002), *The Neurobehavioral Nature of Fishes and the Question of Awareness and Pain*, in: *Reviews in Fisheries Science*, Vol. 10, No.1, p.1

⁶¹ Singer, P., & Mason, J., (2006), *Eating: What we Eat and Why it Matters*, p.112

⁶² Singer, P., (1990), *Animal Liberation*, p.173

⁶³ Singer, P., & Mason, J., (2006), *Eating: What we Eat and Why it Matters*, p.123

⁶⁴ Singer, P., (1990), *Animal Liberation*, p.173

Mexico oil spill.⁶⁵ Environmental responsibility ought to be extended to consumer, who should buy both seafood and vegetables from sustainable sources that have a minimal affect on the environment. For instance, organic farming, in the strictest sense of the word, maintains the quality of the soil, fosters biodiversity, reduces pollution from nitrogen run-off and avoids heavy pesticide and herbicide use, which can destabilise ecosystems.⁶⁶ One could argue that such an assertion is not realistic because of the availability of such sustainable sources, but the problem is not due to supply, it is due to demand: organic food sales in the UK only accounts for 2 percent of total grocery sales, which does not encourage suppliers to move into the organic market.⁶⁷

Conclusion

In conclusion, I would argue that Singer's notion of speciesism is consistent and can withstand criticism. First, assuming all of Singer's premises are correct, I have demonstrated that his notion of speciesism can withstand Alward's rebuttal. Indeed, as the latter does not take into account the notion of triviality, it fails to recognise the relevance of speciesism: eating meat is morally wrong because humans have alternative sources of food. Furthermore, by distinguishing between nociception and conscious pain, I have argued that Singer's examples of pain-related responses are insufficient to conclude that animals consciously experience pain. Nevertheless, by critically examining the role of language in consciousness, I do conclude that mammals and birds possess a limited form of consciousness and thus consciously experience pain, albeit to a lesser degree than humans. Consequently, these species do have a capacity to suffer and moral equality should be extended to them. However, Singer goes too far when he suggests that moral equality should be extended to fish. It is not morally wrong to eat fish, as they 'lack the essential brain region or any functional equivalent, making it untenable that they can experience pain.'⁶⁸ Therefore, following Singer's definition of speciesism, as fish do not have the capacity to suffer, moral consideration should not be extended them. That said, due to the wider environmental implications of commercial fishing and arable farming, I would argue that all foodstuffs should be acquired from a sustainable, environmentally friendly sources.

⁶⁵ The Telegraph, 11 June 2010, www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/newsbysector/energy/oilandgas/7821462/BP-oil-spill-clean-up-costs-could-total-6bn.html

⁶⁶ Singer, P., & Mason, J., (2006), *Eating: What we Eat and Why it Matters*, pp.198-199

⁶⁷ Singer, P., & Mason, J., (2006), *Eating: What we Eat and Why it Matters*, p.192

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