

# Superior Human

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A symposium held last week was a great experience for me and I decided to make a good record of this wonderful symposium. The following conversation is not a full documentation of the night, but it is worth to recall my memory once. I remember that Peter Singer had invited all the prominent thinkers on the basis of argumentative topic of human being and animals. Each of them had different perspectives with respect to the issue and they stood still after the symposium.

PETER SINGER: It's my pleasure to have you all in this symposium tonight! The reason for inviting you to this occasion is to discuss about the status of human being and animals. As all of you have put forward different ideas on the issue, it is my honor to exchange my thoughts with you. Of course, there is no right or wrong, feel free to express your opinion here. Maybe we can have some food before start. The dishes are basically vegetarian food and hope you understand the reason behind while enjoying them. "The enjoyment of such a cuisine is enhanced by the knowledge that its good taste and nourishing qualities were provided directly by the earth, neither wasting what the earth produces, nor requiring the suffering and death of any sentient being" (178). "[W]e take responsibility for our own

lives, and make them as free of cruelty as we can. The first step is that we cease to eat animals” (159). Jeremy Bentham has stated an important essential basis of moral equality of “[e]ach to count for one and none for more than one” (qtd. in Singer 5). It directly brings attention to the consideration of all beings in an identical basis. At the same time, it should be without regard to races, sexes or species as no one should be considered superior to anyone. There should not be a clear boundary between human and animals. It is absolutely arbitrary.

KARL MARX: The food is quite good, however, I cannot agree with the point of human being equaling to animals. It is very clear that man makes his life activity itself an object of his will and consciousness (175), while animals just have nothing more than life activity itself. It is undoubtedly that species-life, both for man and for animals, lives from inorganic nature (174). However, if a man can only act freely on his animal functions, which includes eating, drinking and procreating, his human functions are nothing more than an animal (174). It is exactly happening in the cases of alienation of labour, which estrange nature from man, together with man from his own function as a species-being. As a species-being, human has a free productive life and is conscious of his own life. I have gone a bit far, but I want to point out the difference between human being and animals. Man has conscious life activity. Conscious life activity directly distinguishes man from animal-being (175). Animals are not able to attend equal level with human as they cannot be comparable in such aspect. Due to differentiation of consciousness, human is capable of making their own choices and no one can interfere them. As a result, human has an irreplaceable superior status to animals.

ARISTOTLE: Thank you, Peter! The cuisine made by you is good and also starts the discussion on equality of human and animals. As Karl talked about human nature, I should share my view on the issue. I would say that I am partly concurred with Karl's opinion on human beings, however, the nature of human beings should be reflected by the human functions, in exact reasoning. Moreover, animals have sensation rather than simply ability of eating, drinking and procreating. For plants, their lives consist of nutrition and growth only; for animals, on the basis of getting nutrients to grow, they are capable of having a sentient life. Then what makes the difference between human and animals? In contrast to animals, human is made of additional rational part in two aspects: one amenable to reason, the other possessing it and initiating thought (1098a4–5). Let us take flautist and sculptor as examples. His goodness and proficiency are considered to lie in the perform of that function (1097b25–27). In other words, a good human being is determined by how well a human being performs. Only by this way, human is able to reach a higher level of activities of soul in accordance to virtue, and finally to gain a good life. It should be what human beings chase behind, which animals would have no sense and nothing would be done on this issue.

PETER SINGER: I am glad that you like the food. I would like to interrupt here and Confucius would not mind. Karl has explained a lot about how human and animals are different in a way that human has the consciousness of his own life. However, as I have just said, we should give the same weight as the like interests of any other being. The animals' interest should not depend on what they are like or on what abilities they may possess (5). If Karl and Aristotle keep focusing on what animals are dissimilar to

human in human nature, you will lose your eyes on taking other factors into account. Aristotle's idea on human function is more advanced than Karl's and it is easier for me to agree. Because it collides with my theory on nonhuman animals suffering. Based on scientific findings, animals can feel pain as human does. At the same time, we cannot tell whether animals really do not have reasoning or else. We can experience the pain of animals from their behavioral signs, like moaning and appearing fear to strangers. Therefore, I propose the basic principle of equality, including the important concept of capacity for suffering and enjoyment. One point to add, "[t]he basic principle of equality does not require equal or identical treatment, it requires equal consideration" (2).

CONFUCIUS: It is finally my turn, may I ask you a question first? What is filiality? Peter, you concentrate on equal consideration of animals and omit differences actually exist. "What is meant by filiality today is nothing but being able to take care of your parents. But even hounds and horses can require care. Without respectful vigilance, what is the difference?" (2.7) Human can be considered as a "human", the value of human is fundamentally diverse from animals, based on the word "sentiment". I have once said, "I cannot flock together with the birds and beasts! . . . If I am not a fellow traveler with men such as these, then with whom? If only the Way prevailed in the world I would not have to try to change it!" (18.6) In the world of animals, they care about their desire only. Yet, human relationships are variable and rescuable, even hard to achieve. A critical point is that human would express their solicitude to other human and the world would become better. To conclude, animals are just a species solely with desire, but not sentiment. Human is always superior to animals in this

view. Karl and Aristotle have also neglected the sentiment of human. It is naturally occurred and no need to demand high order thinking.

PETER SINGER: I have never denied the fact that differences exist. You may misunderstand the meaning of equal consideration. “Equal consideration for different beings may lead to different treatment and different rights” (2). For example, dogs cannot vote, it is meaningless to treat them equally as human in this situation. Another example is that women can have abortion while men cannot, physiologically, we cannot force men to abort and ask for equal treatment. “Equality is a moral idea, not an assertion of fact” (4). “The principle 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” (5). We, as human, should not over-expand ourselves, to have a feeling of superior to other creatures.

The symposium is coming to an end and I would like to evaluate on the debate. Karl Marx has put human in a way that we have the consciousness of own life. However, it does not make me have a sense of superiority as animals are not compared from this point. Recent findings have proved that animals are having their consciousness as human. Aristotle claimed that animals have sensation while human has reasoning. In my opinion, treating animals should be far more than that. Even among human, we cannot find a person with the same size and shape, or abilities to deal with various circumstances. I do think Peter Singer’s idea is more capable to nowadays. Human is depleting natural resources and in turn makes animals suffer. Like human continues mass production of palm oil, in spite of burning the habitat for chimpanzees. Chimpanzees can finally be waiting

to die. If we believe that human is always superior to animals, we are actually showing our stupidity and selfishness. “[S]peciesists allow the interests of their own species to override the greater interests of members of other species” (9). Lives of chimpanzees, rabbits and geese are taken because of our selfishness. Animal experiments are conducted on various occasions, such as cosmetic and medical purposes. We should consider carefully before using the concerning products as animals should gain the equal consideration as us. If we have an idea of superiority, we are not able to have a humble heart and view matters in different perspectives.

## Works Cited

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**Teacher's comment:**

The essay of Ms. Wong is a satisfactory work of a first-year undergraduate student. Firstly, she demonstrates an accurate understanding of different theories from our selected texts. Secondly, the dialectic of arguments among different theories is clearly constructed. Thirdly, several possible counter-arguments are provided. Nevertheless, the essay did not emphasize too much on giving the author's own opinions. Should Ms. Wong make more efforts on expressing her own point of view, this article would definitely be a better commentary on classical texts. (Kwok Pak Nin Samson)