Harman’s “The Moral Significance of Animal Pain and Animal Death”
Table of contents

1. Moral Status and Animal Cruelty
2. Killing Without Harming
3. Death and The Deprivation Account
4. McMahan’s View
5. Animal Stages, not Animals, Have Moral Status
Moral Status and Animal Cruelty

The intuition: if animal cruelty is wrong, then killing animals for meat is wrong.

If animal cruelty is wrong, then it is because animals have moral status.

Harman: the best explanation of why animal cruelty is wrong is that they have moral status.

Some ways to doubt this:

- corpses
- habits
The Surprising Claim

Who is Harman addressing?

Usually even meat-eaters are not okay with treating animals with gratuitous cruelty. So if Harman is right . . .

**The Surprising Claim**  (a) We have strong reasons not to cause intense pain to animals: the fact that an action would cause intense pain to an animal makes the action wrong unless it is justified by other considerations; and (b) we do not have strong reasons to kill animals: it is not the case that killing an animal is wrong unless it is justified by other considerations.

Slogan: killing animals for meat is okay if they’re treated decently while alive.
Clarifying the Surprising Claim

“unless justified by other considerations?”

We have a *pro tanto* reason not to cause pain to animals.

**pro tanto reason**  A pro tanto reason is a reason to do something, but may not be decisive. It gives one consideration in favor of the action.

The believer in the Surprising Claim does not believe that in *all* circumstances it is wrong to cause intense pain to animals. Harman is trying to be *fair* to her interlocutor.
Recall Singer’s Overall Argument:

1. Non-human and human animals have the same moral status.
2. You should not kill humans for food or experiment on them in harmful ways.
3. If you shouldn’t do this with humans, if non-human and human animals have the same moral status, then you shouldn’t do it with non-human animals either.
4. So: you shouldn’t kill non-human animals for food or experiment on them in harmful ways.

What does the believer in the Surprising Claim object to?

First and third view: (3). Second view: (1).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Table of contents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Moral Status and Animal Cruelty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Killing Without Harming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Death and The Deprivation Account</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>McMahan’s View</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Animal Stages, not Animals, Have Moral Status</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Here’s Harman’s statement of the view:

**First View** An action that painlessly kills an animal in the prime of life deprives the animal of future life, which would be a positive benefit to the animal, but does not harm the animal.

Not all deprivations harm the thing deprived! Possible examples contest winner, job candidate, euthanasia (note on the word “harm”)

**Understanding the First View**
Objections

Harman: “In particular, actively and physically interfering with a person in such a way that she is deprived of a benefit does typically harm that person” (4). Ex. deafening, maiming. This puts the ball in Harman’s interlocutor’s court. She should say why the animal case is non-typical.

But: Harman’s case could be stronger. We can (maybe?) think of counterexamples to the claim without “typically,” and with “typically,” it is uncertain why this claim is typical. Ex. shots, lottery.

Another idea: painlessly killing humans is (typically) harming them. There is no relevant difference between humans and animals. So painlessly killing animals is (typically) harming them.

Harman’s interlocutor’s court should say what the relevant difference is. (One way to pursue this is with the Third View.)
bad in the self-interested, well-being sense

pain, hurts those you care about, etc. But is the death itself bad? (intrinsic vs. extrinsic)

painless death, no friends or family, etc.

The Deprivation Account of the Badness of Death
The death of a person is bad to the extent that the person is deprived of intrinsic goods and is good to the extent that the person is relieved of intrinsic bads.
A more precise attempt tries to say what “deprived” and “relieved” amount to:

**The Deprivation Account of the Badness of Death (revised)**

The death of a person is bad to the extent that, had the person not died, they would have had intrinsic goods; and it is good to the extent that, had the person not died, the person would have had intrinsic bads.

Note: the view as stated says that this is *all* that makes a death good or bad for someone.

Has been used to argue for the permissibility of (some) euthanasia, abortion, etc.

**Counterfactuals.**
Table of contents

1. Moral Status and Animal Cruelty
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3. Death and The Deprivation Account
4. McMahan’s View
5. Animal Stages, not Animals, Have Moral Status
Time-relative Interests

**Time-relative Interests View** Future intrinsic goods and bads give you a reason to act in proportion to both their intrinsic goodness and badness and the strength of one’s psychological connection to the future version of yourself.

How tragic are the deaths of a 20-year old, a newborn, and a 90-year old Alzheimer’s patient?

Perhaps explains actual behavior.

Has been used to argue for the permissibility of (some) euthanasia and abortion.

Maybe some justification from debates on personal identity.
Time-relative Interests and Animal Death

The idea: at least some animals are weakly enough psychologically connected to their future selves that it is permissible to deprive them of future goods by painlessly killing them.

Harman: this view has the consequence that you should not act to benefit an animal far in the future if it pains it a bit now. Consider the case of Tommy.

Tommy is a horse with a serious illness. If the illness is not treated now and is allowed to run its course, Tommy will live an ordinary discomfort-free life for five years, but then Tommy will suffer horribly for several months and then die. If the illness is treated now, then Tommy will undergo surgery under anesthetic tomorrow. Tommy will suffer over the following two weeks, but not nearly as severely as he would five years from now. Tommy will be completely cured and will be able to live a healthy normal life for another fifteen years.
Harman: it is clearly okay to give Tommy the surgery. So TRI must be wrong.

Notice: consider the case where Tommy is a small infant.
Stages?

Temporal parts, slices, and worms.

Motivations: material objects, esp. personal identity, nature of change.

Harman: making sense of why it is justified to hurt someone now in order to benefit them more later makes sense requires that the person, not just the person stages, have status. The same is true of animals. Consider a case like that of Tommy . . . .