

My thesis is that only human beings have a right to life. This has some initial plausibility; certainly most people most of the time act like only humans have this right. People are legally allowed to euthanize their pets or livestock without any good reason, and it is not considered murder to hunt or kill animals that don't belong to anyone. These are only laws, but most people seem comfortable with these laws, suggesting that they reflect common-sense morality. However, while the claim that only humans have the right to life has some initial plausibility, there are a number of objections to it. If none of these are strong objections, then we should conclude that my thesis is correct.

First objection: there is something morally reprehensible about people who kill animals for fun. If such a person got incredible amounts of pleasure out of this, this would only make the killing more awful, not less. If animals had no right to life, then the killing of animals would be permissible if the killing brought enough pleasure into the world. Since killing animals for fun is wrong even if it brings a great amount of pleasure into the world, and probably more wrong if it brings *more* pleasure, animals must have a right to life (at least, that's the objection).

I agree that there is something morally reprehensible about people who kill animals for fun. But this doesn't show that animals have a right to life. The reason why it is morally reprehensible is that when we see animals feel pain or die, it triggers the same parts of our brain that react when humans feel pain [citation omitted]. If a person enjoys killing animals, they must lack this part of the brain. This makes them more dangerous to humans, who really do have a right to life. And research on serial killers shows that they always start by harming animals [citation omitted]. So, even if there is something morally reprehensible about people who kill animals for fun, this doesn't show that animals have a right to life – killing animals for fun is reprehensible because *humans* have a right to life.

[other objections discussed and responded to]

As we've seen, there are no good objections to the claim that animals have no right to life. Since it is initially plausible to most people that animals have no right to life, we should conclude that this is true.

Argument form (roughly):

Claim x seems initially plausible (so is only briefly argued for).

Here are the serious objections to x .

None of them are good objections.

So, x is true.

My thesis is that all living beings have a right to life. That's a surprising view. Most people tend to think only humans have a right to life; the other common view is that all humans and also sentient animals have a right to life. However, it turns out that neither of these can be true. Any argument that only humans have a right to life must appeal to some feature x that all humans have, and no non-human has, which gives humans a right to life. I'll show that, for all such features, there is some human who lacks that feature, or some animal that has it, and so it simply isn't true that all and only humans have a right to life. The next best view is that all sentient beings have a right to life. However, I'll argue that sentience only matters if rights are only violated when a being can experience the violation. If this were true, a person could not have their rights violated by being put into the experience machine unknowingly. This is an unacceptable claim. This leaves us with the views that only some humans have rights to life, that no beings have rights to life, or that all living beings have rights to life...

Argument form (roughly):

Here are all the things that are possibly true: x, y, z .

Option x may not be that plausible, but options y and z are even less plausible than x .

Thus, x must be true.

All beings that are self-conscious have property rights. Why does self-consciousness confer this right? If a being is self-conscious, then it can conceive of itself as occupying some space. If it can conceive of itself occupying some space, then it can choose to occupy that space or not. Depriving such a being of space it *chooses* to occupy restricts its freedom. Restrictions of freedom are wrong, even if they are not harmful. To see why, consider a person who is locked into their house for several hours. However, they don't know they are locked in, and by coincidence they don't try to leave. This person is not affected in any way, so they are not harmed, yet locking them in is clearly wrong. This can only be explained if it is wrong to deprive the person of their freedom, and so we can conclude that restricting freedom is wrong even when not harmful. Thus, taking land away from a self-conscious being is wrong, even when not harmful, which means that self-conscious beings have property rights.

Argument form (roughly):

Whenever x is true, y is also true (or "All x have feature y ")

And whenever y is true, z is true ("All things with feature y have feature z ")

Thus, whenever x is true, z is true ("All x have feature z ")

My view is that all warm blooded living beings have a right to life, and no other beings have a right to life. Let's consider the examples of beings that we are most confident have a right to life. These include all humans, Vulcans from Star Trek, kittens, puppies, primates, elephants, whales and dolphins. Which beings most plausibly don't have rights? These include plants, bacteria, fungi, fish, jellyfish, and insects. There is nothing that all of the beings that clearly have rights have in common other than being warm blooded. Most of them are mammals but Vulcans are not. Some are intelligent, but kittens are not very smart, nor are human babies. Some have close social relationships, but Vulcans have no emotions and so cannot form these bonds. ...

While this view fits the evidence very well, it may seem *ad hoc*: there seems to be nothing morally relevant about being warm blooded. I will now respond to that objection...

Argument form (roughly):

We have the following evidence: $E1, E2, E3, E4$.

Hypothesis x fits all the evidence.

No other hypothesis does.

Thus, x is true.

Thesis: If a being cannot survive with x , then that being has a right to have x . My argument is that many beings have evolved to require specific things, which are therefore necessary for their survival.

Thesis: If a being is able to flourish, then it is wrong to kill that being. My argument is that flourishing is expressing the capacities that make a being's life meaningful or valuable, and thus beings that can flourish have a right to life.