

SUMMARY OF PHILOSOPHICAL VIEWS REGARDING THE TREATMENT OF ANIMALS

1. Introduction

The issue or concern with animal rights has become very important to many people in society and because of this many animal rights groups have been formed to “be the voice” of the animals and to fight for their rights as they are unable to do so themselves. There are various views and opinions with regard to the way in which animals must be treated. We can distinguish between three categories of views, these are the materialist, pantheistic and theistic views on animal rights. (Geiseler, 2010:335-336)

2. Different views

Before Darwin formulated his evolution theory all views on animal rights had the same belief which stated that humans and animals are differentiated only because humans are rational thinkers and animals are not. After evolution theory saw the light materialist thinkers changed their view and stated that humans and animals only differ in degree and not in kind as animals and humans both have the ability to sense, think, love, remember, to pay attention, to be curious as well as to reason. Thus we can say that materialist views humans and animals to be the same with only a difference in degree. Later they gathered evidence to show that both animals and humans are capable of problem solving, that just like humans animals form groups or societies with members of the same species and it is said that the final proving factor which shows that humans and animals don't differ in kind but only degree is the absence or non-existence of the rational soul. (Geisler, 2010:336-38) Thus we can come to the conclusion that the materialist perspective is that humans and animals must enjoy the same rights.

The pantheistic views on animal rights hold the view that all beings is God and it therefore fails to see or identify the distinction between a divine being and a created being. It argues that nature is a living organism and not only a manifestation of God and due to the existence of a mutual energy which binds nature as a living organism humans have lost the right to use animals for their personal greed. As animals are seen as a manifestation of God it is stated that an attack on any animal to meet a humans instrumental needs is an attack on God. Another implication of the pantheistic view is that as man now forms part of nature any attack against nature is in fact an attack on oneself and must therefore protect animals to protect the divinity they share with man. Thus the pantheistic view on animal rights state that animals are divine beings and are therefore also worthy of reverence like humans. (Geisler, 2010:341-342)

The theistic view on animal rights holds that there is a distinct distinction between God, Who is the Creator, man and animals, which is the created. God alone is worthy to be revered, humans may be respected due to the fact that they were created in the image of God and animals were created to fulfil the needs of humanity. Humans in return have the responsibility to take care of animals and to preserve them instead of destroy and exploit them. There is furthermore no obligation from humans towards animals except to refrain from being cruel to animals and with the actual obligation from man being towards God in the form of using the animals He created properly and to preserve them. (Geisler, 2010:357)

References

Geisler, N.L., (2010). *Christian Ethics: Contemporary Issues and Options*. (2nd ed.). Michigan:Baker Publishing Group