

Essentially, **ahimsa** is a principle which means non-violence. It is reflected in modern animal rights theories, although not always by name. Ahimsa is more than 5,000 years old, originating in Jainism, a religion of India. Virtually none of us wishes to suffer significant mental or physical harms. Reason, though, requires consistency. If someone harmed is not oneself, or is outside of one's favorite group(s), these facts do not give oneself a *license to harm* these others. A license to harm is contrary to ahimsa, or a duty not to harm. We also reject racism and sexism, or systematic harms done or allowed to people of colour and women. Racists or sexists gain no license to harm from victims possessing darker skin or female attributes. In 1970, Richard Ryder coined the term *speciesism*: systematically harming sentient beings not of one's species, or allegedly "missing" a supposed species-characteristic, e.g., rationality. The most popular philosophy against animal rights is: We may harm animals for perceived human benefit because they are mental inferiors.

However, speciesists derive no license to harm from their victims being nonhuman or mentally disadvantaged. We should not harm mentally disabled humans, albeit speciesist philosopher, R. G. Frey, is dangerously consistent in rejecting animal rights. He accepts both mentally challenged humans and nonhuman animals being used for harmful medical research. Now suppose, hypothetically, that much more beautiful, intelligent, and ethical alien beings visited our planet. Since they are nonhuman, would we have a license to harm them? Based on our being of a different species, or mentally inferior, should the aliens have a license to harm *us*? Ahimsa replies: **No**. We avoid harm to ourselves partly because pain *feels bad*, always and everywhere. The same feeling bad is true for *all* sentient beings, so our judgment of bad corresponds to reality. Reflecting reality is as important for reasoning as consistency. We only accept harm to humans based on defense or unavoidability. Neither excuse clears animal oppression. Yet speciesists "need" a license to harm animals, for severe harms are commonplace.

Indeed, rejecting serious harms to animals compels vegans to disavow how nonhumans are exploited in modern societies. Animals suffer terribly on trap-lines, sometimes chewing off limbs caught in steel-jaw leg hold traps. Or they insanely pace in circles while imprisoned on so-called "fur farms." Factory farming involves feeding 50 billion animals per year vile food that often includes excrement, and keeping them packed so tightly that they can barely move, in an atmosphere rife with pollution which human visitors scarcely tolerate. The animals' confines are only cleaned at slaughter time. Animals with serious diseases are denied all treatment. Transport and slaughter are studies in cruelty as well. Animals, against their rights, have the worst ailments inflicted on them in laboratories. That is not even scientific for studying human diseases. Sheep can consume gallons of arsenic without ill effect although this is a deadly poison for humans. The discoverers of penicillin are grateful they did not test on Guinea pigs, since that drug kills those nonhumans. Animals in circuses and aquaria languish in squalid enclosures and filth, trained by harsh methods. Hunters kill members of free-living families for fun, rather like psychopathic serial killers. Fish perish in an agony of suffocation in the air, or have hooks piercing lips that are as rich in nerves as our fingertips. Cats and dogs are bred in excreta and illness for pet stores, while millions of unwanted other sentient beings are killed each year due to "overpopulation."

All of this indefensible, unnecessary harm must **STOP!** Let us take responsibility for each and every arbitrary harm that we could inflict or allow. It is time to call off all hypocrisy and selfishness in tolerating harms to others that we would *never* permit to impinge upon ourselves. Most people do not make these crucial connections. They take a "license to harm" animals for granted. Let us think critically, *reasoning* about these matters, and cut away the invisible chains of oppression that bind speciesists to their nonhuman victims.

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