

ISRG Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (ISRGJAHSS)



ISRG PUBLISHERS

Abbreviated Key Title: ISRG J Arts Humanit Soc Sci

ISSN: 2583-7672 (Online)

Journal homepage: <https://isrgpublishers.com/isrgjahss>

Volume – III Issue -II (March – April) 2025

Frequency: Bimonthly



Reviving Animal Welfare: A Philosophical Appraisal of Barbarism or Civilization?

Nde Paul Ade

Department of Philosophy, Faculty of Arts, The University of Bamenda, Bamenda, Cameroon.

| **Received:** 05.04.2025 | **Accepted:** 10.04.2025 | **Published:** 17.04.2025

***Corresponding author:** Nde Paul Ade

Department of Philosophy, Faculty of Arts, The University of Bamenda, Bamenda, Cameroon.

Abstract

Animal welfare is a crucial issue of concern today as it portrays a clear reflection of human responsibility towards the wellbeing and treatment of other living beings. I emphasize that, there is a progressing recognition that animals possess intrinsic value and merit to be treated respectfully and compassionately. This belief has resulted to the promulgation of laws and regulations that guarantee and protect animals from cruelty, suffering, neglect, disrespect and pain. Animal welfare addresses a wide range of issues including; the treatment of animals in agriculture, research, scientific testing, entertainment and trade. In agriculture, there is an emerging concern related to the conditions animals are raised for food. Intensive confinement, inhumane procedures of research and animal testing involving pain and cruelty, without anesthesia, adversely affect animal welfare to a greater extent. I conclude that, there is need to ensure that animals are used only when very necessary needs arise, their (animals) suffering and pains should be prevented or minimized drastically and alternative methods (non-invasive techniques) that do not involve animal testing, horror, agony and pain should be adopted. Promoting ethical practices and collective efforts advocating for animals' rights create and a more humane world for the friendly cohabitation of all living beings.

Keywords: Animal Welfare, Barbarism, Civilization, Cultural Relativism, Inhumane

INTRODUCTION

The question of animal welfare in the world as a whole, has evolved as a crucial and significant subject of discussions and debates in traditions, customs, religions, and international law. Animal welfare refers to the ethical and moral responsibility humans have towards the wellbeing and treatment of animals. It involves the physical, mental, and emotional aspects of animals'

lives which aims at ensuring that they (animals) are free from unnecessary suffering, pain, cruelty and harm. The signification of animals' welfare has evolved over time, shifting from the traditional perspective that initially considered animals as mere properties to be used or (mal) treated for human interests and benefits, entertainment, food, and satisfaction. Despite the

existence of international law principles addressing, protecting, and enhancing animal welfare from a global perspective, animals still undergo torture, agony, suffering, horror, leading to the jeopardy and extinction of some animals, especially in Africa. Following International guidelines, animal welfare involves freedom of animals from discomfort, pain, hunger, thirst, fear, distress, injury, disease, and expression of normal behavior (UK Farm Animal Welfare Council). This barbaric and inhumane treatment meted on animals is unacceptable in a civilized world like ours, as it deprives animals of their rights to survival and existence on earth. For instance, the use of whales for entertainment, for making soup, cow skin for the production of leather, clothes, shoes, and for decoration, portrays the cruelty of humans towards other animals across cultures (Draeger, 2007). Similarly J. Derrida (2008) firmly holds that, dynamism should be manifested by mankind which includes power and justice through the attribution of names to animals considered as categories. To him, humans do not have the right to name animals because of the “heterogeneous multiplicity of living things” (p. 31). Here, animals are regarded as part of humans as emphasized in Derrida’s *The Animal that therefore I am* (2008). From some of the unfriendly and gruesome cases cited earlier, humans are therefore obligated not to cause unnecessary pain and suffering on animals and birds. In other words, animals deserve a humane treatment and a less painful consideration. To buttress this statement, J. Lamer (1978) propounds that, “suffering which one may intelligently avoid for an animal is unnecessary” (p. 458).

It is worth pointing out that, most countries, especially African countries, are unaware and non-sensitized about the importance of respecting international laws on animal welfare, as a means to minimize or curb animal cruelty usually manifested in Africa. Through factory farms and poultries, cheap milk, fast milk, and fast eggs production, result from the painful treatment of animals like things or machines without being treated as sensitive or living creatures. For instance, statistically, fenced farmed animals and domestic animals in Africa represent approximately 98% of all animals with whom people are expected to portray love and kindness, as well as contemplate their beauty and diversity in the world. To D. Wolfson & Sullivan (2004), the necessity of human interaction with companion animals and those in the zoos and circuses cannot be underestimated. Moreover, in Africa, 99.9% of chickens are raised for eating (meat) and 98% for laying eggs (p. 205). The methodology applied in this paper is analytico-critical. The analytical traces and explores cases against respect for animal welfare, especially within Africa. The critical approach scrutinizes animal welfare within the African contexts by uncovering the objections, misunderstandings, challenges and shortcomings of animal welfare.

The main preoccupation of this study is the extent to which non-human beings are cruelly treated. In other words, to what extent are animals given unfriendly treatment and what is the way forward to eradicate human cruelty against animals? This problem and question could be subdivided as follows: How far have animals been victims to human maltreatment? What are some of the objections, challenges and setbacks of animal welfare implementation? How far have philosophical and religious considerations enhanced animal welfare? What is still left undone in order to prevent present and future animal suffering? In order to properly scrutinize these concerns, this paper is divided into four parts. Part one examines cases/aspects of cruel animal treatment. The second part reveals objections, misunderstandings and

challenges of animal welfare. The third part constitute philosophical and religious considerations in support of animal welfare. The fourth and final part propounds effective measures to curb and eradicate inhumane and unfriendly behaviors against animals and their welfare.

EVIDENCES OF INHUMANE TREATMENT OF ANIMALS

Many indicators of horror, pain, and suffering characterize animal treatment in most parts of the world. These attitudes adversely impact animal welfare. For instance, several animal body parts, including tails, teeth, testicles, horns, bones, beaks, among others, are usually extracted using bolt-cutters and without administering pain killers. The unfounded and flimsy claim for this cruel treatment is because, mutilated animals are easily handled when parked in limited space, coupled with the high cost of mutilated meat in the markets. Also, mutilating animals before being transported to the slaughter houses is meant for preventing the stabbing and wounding of animals with their horns that could reduce the quality and price of meat (Francois, 2007). Following this, P. Singer (2009) explains that, some animals are usually killed as they move faster toward slaughter houses to be cut up into tanks. Closed parking of pigs also leads to the killing of piglets by bigger pigs, leaving them with sores; hens equally die in their cages slowly and agonizingly, due to prolapsed uterus (Marcus, 2005: pp. 20-21).

However, the act of inflicting such amount of pain on animals could be prevented. Animals could still be consumed and in small quantities without necessarily treating them “inhumanely”. Animals are used for entertainment which results to inhumane treatment through dogfighting, cockfighting, bull running and cock tossing. Moreover, many African constitutions neglect animal welfare, such as the *Cameroon Criminal Code*, which does not proscribe the cruel treatment of animals deemed by international law as an indecent and illegal feature of the modern society. A personal experience witnessed concerning the breaking of a cow’s teeth in a Yaoundé slaughter house (Abattoir), was as follows:¹ Similarly, though the Council of Europe (1961) stated that, “the humane treatment of animals is one of the hallmarks of western civilization”, it is still a far-fetched assertion from on African context, since animal treatment is still relatively poor and very cruel. Africa is being blamed for their inability to attain the standards of animal welfare prescribed by the international law policies on animal rights, and for the lack of animal welfare

¹A cow was tied and locked into the slaughter house while a butcher tried to remove the upper teeth of the cow. Since it was a difficult task, a second butcher sent a long stick into the cow’s mouth to force it open with cow’s head roughly thrown upwards to let his its mouth open. A third butcher came in with asset of heavy bolt-cutters and placed on the horns. The cow started screaming loudly and intensely which took minutes, accompanied by laughter from those present as the cow struggled in deep pain and agony. The bolt-cutters were later placed on the cow’s teeth and clamped together, causing the teeth to be broken and extracted from the gums. The same procedure followed the amputation of the lower teeth, and when I enquired why such a cruel method? The response was that, the method used in breaking the teeth was to increase the pain the cow will undergo and to ease transportation without intending to cut the parts later.

legislations in most African policies and cultures. To P. Wedderburn (2010), “this barbaric cruelty meted on animals must stop”. However, it is worth noting that, the conceptions of “Civilization” and “Barbarism” attributed to animal treatment vary among contemporary thinkers as some consider civilization to be ambiguous and vague: “No word is more vague and has permitted the committing of more crimes than that of civilization” as stated by C. Salomon (1989) when he writes: “*Nul mot n’est plus vague et n’as permit de comprendre de plus grandes inquiétudes que celui de civilization*” (p. 106)). Notwithstanding, it is worth emphasizing that, international laws on animal protection, the poor treatment of animals is barbaric and the respect for animal welfare is the feature of a civilized society as indicated by Koskeniemi (2002).

CHALLENGES OF ANIMAL WELFARE IMPLEMENTATION

Civilization versus Barbarism

Controversial schools of thought advance the argument according to which, the emergence of international law from the 19th century is an attempt of colonial powers to subdue other communities as a means to justify the ambitions of colonialism. On one hand, civilization is understood as a form of imperialism, closely linked to the mission and deeper nature of the law (J. Brunnee & T. Stephen, 2010). On the other hand, the use and abuse of civilization focus on the belief that, the cruel treatment of animals termed as “things” is a distinct aspect of African culture, adding that, pressure from the West to stop such cruel animal treatment is a clear demonstration of cultural imperialism and racism, which is opposed to the act of whale-eating considered by the Japanese as a unique cultural practice, though considered by the West as barbaric (K. Hirata, 2003).

Cultural Relativism

In Africa, precisely, respect, compassion, the struggle for survival between humans and animals, as well as feeling for animals has been an old issue of concern in most spiritual, historical and cultural contexts. Animals have always been ruthlessly treated by humans over the years, though the rights of human beings have been earlier addressed, treated and discussed than animal welfare ideas and concerns. Here, animals are radically separated from humans because they are regarded as “things” or “objects”, without human qualities such as the capacity to endure pain, suffering, feeling, happiness, just to name these few. Also, animals are classified as “machines”, only meant for their ability to convert food into flesh or commercial products as Harrison (1964) admits. Too, the idea of factory farms or fenced farms as adopted by Africans, originated from the Western advanced farming systems, extending through other areas of the world, thereby distorting traditional animal rearing and farming methods in Africa. This partly influences the reluctance in treating animals in Africa as subjects deserving rights and welfare. Following this, the form of animal treatment expected from Africans is determined by their value to humans in general, given that, moral questions are equally a portion of human responsibilities contributing to interactional international law (Brunnee & Toope, 2001). Similarly, the British poet O’Hearn (2003), in his *Elizabeth Costello*, advanced the idea of cultural relativism as connected to animal rights when he writes:

My first reservation about the animal rights movement is that by failing to recognize its historical nature, it runs the risk of becoming like the human rights movement, yet another western crusade against the practices of the

rest of the world, claiming universality for what are simply its own standards. Non-Western cultures have their own norms for the treatment of animals and see no reason to adopt ours, particularly when ours are of such recent invention (p. 107).

The declaration above proves that, the treatment of animals varies, and mainly depends on the cultural beliefs of various peoples. So it should not just be limited to personal sentiments and choices. Therefore, it is a form of practice that is unique among various cultural identities like African, European, American, feminine, affluent, metropolitan, etc.

In addition, realists believe that, “survival of the fittest” ideology is a major feature of the world, because the world itself is a jungle and the rule of the jungle is determined by the strongest who are meant to win. Worthy of note is that, laws are indispensable due to their normative capacities, fidelity, and reliability. But, the inability to detect norms that could be universally shared and applied in a complex and heterogeneous world like ours, present one of the greatest impediments of international law upholding cultural differences, and in determining human-animal relations with emphasis on animal welfare. Hence, Objectivity, transparency, morality, and natural justice, should be taken into account by legitimate international law, so as to prevent the exercise of tyranny (arbitrary power) which characterizes the law of the jungle as suggested by Brunnee & Toope (2001: p. 56). The possible solution involving understanding and sharing of norms, opinions, and propositions, are procedures for legality with emphasis on humane treatment of other creatures irrespective of their nature.

Moreover, bearing in mind that man’s relation to animals is distinct, radical, separated, and characterized by survival of the fittest, humans are referred to as the strongest among other creatures, possessing an almost absolute power, due to their ability to make rational and moral decisions. Again, very little attention has been given so far to address animal exploitation at both national and international levels of laws (G. Francoine, 1995; H. Beston, 1992). According to Francoine & Beston, animals are related to humans as “other nations”, rather than as less perfected beings and approximations of ourselves (pp. 24-25). This Bestonian conception of animals differs from Descartes’ idea of animals as, “machines” or “*automata*”. To Beston (1992), “are we to believe that these birds, all of them, are machines, as Descartes insisted over the years, or is there some psychic relation between these creatures?” (p. 25). Based on Beston’s analysis, a better, wiser, and even a mystical conception of animals is vital in criminalizing animal exploitation across the globe (p. 24).

That notwithstanding, it is worth buttressing that, philosophical theories, systems, cultural and spiritual traditions of the entire world, disagree unanimously on the particular treatment to be meted on animals, coupled with the extent to which humans are obligated to show kindness and compassion to other creatures. Principles that guarantee a good lifestyle from many traditions should persistently take animal welfare concerns into account, in order to avoid concluding that, animal welfare is reserved for the West as a Western attempt to impose Western values on Non-Western communities. To add, some Africans still believe that, since it (animal welfare) originated from Western traditions, it is therefore deemed as a manifestation of Western hegemony over African culture, thereby limiting and retarding the implementation of animal protection and emancipation within Africa and beyond. A typical example of Western emphasis on animal welfare and

demonstration of Western hegemony is evident in T. O'Hearn's (2003) assertion "we have access to an ethical universal principle to which other traditions are blind" (p. 105). Humanists like C. Wolfe (2010) appeals to empirical sciences and critical reasoning, instead of relying on revelation and religious authorities as sources of knowledge about nature, man's position in it, and in determining grounds for morality. Here, even the defense of animal welfare and human domination of animals were not justifiable through scripture or divine revelation. To A. Nelson (2010: 95), African and Asian countries, excluding Japan, are examples of confirmed countries having the lowest percentage of animal protection.

Again, G. Pereira (1992), admitted the existence of a transforming intellectual environment, constituting, "distrust of traditions, preoccupation with method and the institution of critical questioning" (p. 167). Pereira (1992) purports that, humans are unique beings, while animals are not, reason being that, if animals have feelings, then, recognizing sensitivity in animals is tantamount to concluding that, animals are intelligent and endowed with reasoning faculties. Like Pereira (1992), Descartes (1837) affirms that, humans differ from animals because man possesses reasoning faculties and immortal soul, which are missing in the animal system which would have rendered them similar to human qualities as he states, "Were there such machines exactly resembling in organs and outward an ape or any other irrational animal, we could have no means of knowing if they were in any respect of a different nature from these animals" (p. 97). To add, N. Malebranche (1980) supports the view that, unlike humans, animals do not feel pain, pleasure, hate, or love when he admits in relation to animals that:

They eat without pleasure, cry without pain, grow without knowing it; they desire nothing, know nothing; and if they act in a manner that demonstrates intelligence, it is because God, having made them in order to preserve them, made their bodies in such a way that they mechanically avoid what is capable of destroying them (p. 494).

PHILOSOPHICAL AND RELIGIOUS CONCERNS FOR ANIMAL WELFARE

Philosophical Concerns for Animal Welfare

According to P. Singer (2009), the term "Speciesism" originated from Aristotle (1953), which describes the hierarchy of nature as a chain of existence, placing man at the top and other animals occupying the bottom for the benefits of humans. The Eastern belief systems prescribe respect for all creatures of life, by advocating for a strong sense of attachment, rather than division of man and other creatures. This partly influenced the Western thinkers and English reformers who propagated and intensified the protection of animals. However, animals deserve humane treatment, because each animal possesses something special, natural, and beautiful. According to Preece (1999), perpetual concerns for the interests of other creatures do exist, due to the similarities between humans and animals which provokes human kindness and gentility towards animals. Similarly, M. Scully (2002) attributes the origin of merciful treatment of animals to religious thought systems, especially those of the West. Moreover, in the 6th Century BC, Pythagoras propounded "Metempsychosis", characterized by the transmigration of the soul from one person to another, and from one specie to the other. He (Pythagoras) is believed to have criticized the exploitation of animals by man, and

for prescribing vegetarianism, despite the limited documentation of his life and ideas (Preece, 2008: 76-79). To add, Zeno of Citium and founder of Stoicism considered the finality of a good life as: "living in harmony with nature" (p. 145).

Religious Considerations for Animal Welfare

The Jews and Christians constitute categories that firmly condemn cruel animal treatment. These belief systems justify the reason why non-conformist vegetarian movements existed in both religions. For instance, the oldest Indian religion (*Jainism*), advocates for the unconditional concern for life, by respecting the characteristic of "life force" in humans, animals, plants, including natural features such as water, rocks, mountains, rivers, seas, oceans, and more (Chapple, 1993). Emphatically, following the teachings of *Ahimsa*, *Jains* are conditioned to avoid violence and refrain from inflicting pain or harming other creatures. The deep respect for other living things also extends to the act of eating a restricted vegetarian food (p. 11). Moreover, the *Jains* habits of limiting their religious practices only to a particular geographical space amplifies their desires to renounce and avoid any form of harm to be inflicted on others in far-off places (p. 10). It is worth stating that, *Jainism* greatly influenced other religions like Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islamism. For example, Buddhism also values the respect for animals, non-violence, and seriously condemns the act of taking away life. Similarly, Confucianism propagates equality between humans and animals as an ideal lifestyle, since humans live within and are subjected to nature, rather than placing man above or out of nature (Preece, 1995: 5). Too, the inseparability of human-animals relations is equally evident in Hinduism and cited as, "the best of all actions" (p. 5). Even the priestly caste (Brahman), prescribes vegetarianism (p. 26), though animal sacrifices and meat eating are sometimes tolerated (Chapple, p. 16).

However, the fact that modern India contains the world's most populated vegetarians, constitutes evidences of a more humane human-animal link and facilitates respect for animal welfare. Nevertheless, documented cases of cruelty affecting human-animal relations and animal sacrifices noticed in some regions, result from unequal distribution of resources, scarcity of vital needs like food and the struggle for survival. For instance, Islamism permits the use of animals as food and for rituals, though animals are generally portrayed as creatures having feelings and interests of their own (Eddine, 2006). Thus, animals deserve compassion and ethical considerations (Foltz, 2006).

Similarly, another manifestation of human-animal links was shown by Emperor Akbar, ruler of most of Central and Northern India in the 16th Century. He applied non-violence and animal protection learned from the monks in his government, by promulgating and enhancing laws protecting hares, leopards, mice, dogs, serpents, fish, horses, monkeys, by either prohibiting or limiting their slaughter. Also, he almost gave up eating meat (Chapple, p. 27). Again, the concern for animals pushed some kings of the Indian states like Gujarat, to proscribe the killing of animals, by setting up special courts for the prosecution of people who treated animals cruelly (Chandola, 2002: 8). To add, a Scottish poet and political radical (Oswald, 2000) states that, Hindu tradition involves abstaining from meat after his publication of *The Cry of Nature* (1971), portraying India as a model of compassion, vegetarianism, and humanity, contrary to the brutality of the West when he writes: "The humane mind turning her eyes to Hindostan, dwells with heart-felt consideration on the happy spot, where mercy protects her right hand the streams of life, and every animal is allowed to

enjoy in peace the portion of bliss which nature prepared it to receive” (p. 81). Following Shevelov (2008: 75-80), Oswald resigned from the Army to show his discontent about the maltreatment of the Indians by the British soldiers. Too, the unnecessary infliction of pain and suffering on animals is equally being considered in many traditions, cultures, and civilizations, aimed at reducing suffering of animals. Unfortunately, Africans usually neglect these values when interacting with animals, reason why cases of animal cruelty are still ongoing in Africa.

TOWARDS AN EFFECTIVE LEGALIZATION OF ANIMAL WELFARE

The humane treatment of animals and animal welfare within and out of Africa can be encouraged, enhanced, legalized, and intensified through the implementation of heavy sanctions and punishment on victims of animal charges, especially because almost all developed countries pass legislations forbidding animal cruelty practices. Here, justice and animal emancipation are necessary to produce the greatest quantity of happiness (J. Bentham, 1961: 310). This involves paying attention to animal welfare, by recognizing the sensitivity of animals. Furthermore, humane animal treatment is necessary to be enshrined into the constitutions and laws of each and every country, like the Brazilian Constitution which prescribes the obligation for every citizen to show compassion for all living creatures, “to protect the fauna and the flora, with prohibition, in the manner prescribed by law, of all practices which represent a risk to their ecological function, causing the extinction of species or subject animals to cruelty” (Article 225, VIII). Even the Swiss constitution emphasizes that, the government shall legislate on the keeping, caring, use, import animal products and protection of animals, while considering, “the dignity of beings and the safety of humans, animals, and the environment” (Article 120, 2).

However, though no reliable multilateral international treaties exist on animal welfare (rights), the past few decades have registered significant progress on animal rights at the level of international law, terming animals as “subjects” deserving regulation and humane treatment. About fifty years ago, discussions on animals were rare, compared to today. Various legal systems are more concerned about the valorization and protection of animals from inhumane treatment. Most importantly, some basic international required standards to attain animal welfare include; suitable and spacious space for animals with comfortable shelter. Too, fast diagnosis and treatment should be given to animals expressing pain or infected by diseases, by maintaining quality health through the provision of fresh water and quality food, conditions for treatment should not involve pain or suffering of the animal, as well as, providing company to animals depending on their kinds. So far, the Council of Europe, under the auspices of *Convention for the Protection of Animals during International Transport* (1968), has been a remarkable plus to the protection of transported animals from suffering by verifying pre-loading, sufficient space, good weather, regular provision of food, among others.

Regrettably, most African countries still express reluctance in signing conventions that protect animal welfare as modern conceptions of animal rights require. In addition, the *Convention on Biological Diversity* (1992), organized in Rio by the *United Nations Conference on Environment and Development*, involving 193 parties, agreed to preserve species and the ecosystem, as well as, enhance development and the preservation of biodiversity through the use of equitable available resources, with emphasis on

the “intrinsic significance of biodiversity”, not leaving out respect for the ethical concerns of human-animal relations.

CONCLUSION

In the field of research, animal welfare has always been a significant preoccupation. Although animal testing has contributed enormously to numerous medical and scientific advancements, there is still a *dire* need to ensure that animals are used only when necessary and that their suffering, pain, agony and abuse should be minimized at all costs. For instance, alternatives methods that do not involve animals or pain, such as non-invasive techniques should be implemented as salutary remedies to animal welfare. In fact, animal welfare is a very vital aspect of our society that clearly reflects our values and behaviors towards animals in particular and other living beings as a whole. Many Acts, Articles, Conventions, Texts, Declarations, and legislations connected to the recognition and protection of animal welfare exist in international law. Irrespective of the presence of these laws on animal welfare, the treatment of animals in many parts of the world especially in Africa, is still very low, compared to those within the framework of modern, urban, and Western cultures of the developed nations. The less concern for animals portrayed by Africans ranges from cultural differences, absence of affection for non-human forms of existence, the physical environment, and nature as a whole. Consequently, controversial opinions and beliefs such as Descartes’ consideration of animals as machines, without feelings, contradicts the ideas of Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims and those of some indigenous peoples of the ancient cultural contexts, who regard animals as the extended family relatives of humans.

These aforementioned opposing views have contributed in addressing animal pain, agony, suffering and inhumane animal treatment usually neglected by law. To R. Harrison (1964), “billions of animals are born, grown, and slaughtered every year in an non-conducive environment that only qualifies them as animal machines and this barbaric treatment of animals is partly facilitated by law” (p. 14). However, there is hope from international law, stating a categorical denial of equating animals with machines and for proving and regarding animals as “sentient creatures”, capable of feeling pain and enduring suffering. Since some animals are reserved for human consumption, a distinction is necessary in identifying those species to be accorded machine considerations. Finally, given that a proper understanding of animal welfare involves the physical, mental, and emotional aspects of animals’ lives aimed at freeing animals from unnecessary pain and harm, effective collective effort is required to guarantee a compassionate, painless, friendly, humane, and respectful treatment of animals. By promoting ethical practices that value and respect non-human beings and all other living beings, by advocating and propagating the rights of animals, we can ensure a more humane coexistence of humans and animals, including all other living beings on earth.

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