

Dr. James S. Spiegel, Christian Ethics, Session 18, Animal Rights

Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Spiegel, Christian Ethics, Session 18, Animal Rights, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. James S. Spiegel's Christian Ethics session on animal rights explores the question of animal rights and human obligations toward animals, particularly concerning factory farming and biomedical research. It examines arguments from key figures like **Peter Singer**, who advocates for equal consideration based on the capacity for suffering and introduces the concept of speciesism, and **Tom Regan**, who argues for inherent value in animals due to their being "experiencing subjects of life." The session also considers alternative perspectives, such as **R.G. Fry's** focus on quality of life and **Andrew Tardif's** theological argument for vegetarianism based on the principle of double effect and a hierarchy of being. Finally, it addresses biblical perspectives on animal care, suggesting a duty of respectful treatment rooted in divine ownership and specific scriptural commands, ultimately recommending a serious consideration of animal welfare in our actions and choices.

2. 16 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Spiegel, Christian Ethics, Session 18 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (Theology → Apologetics → Christian Ethics).



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3. Briefing Document: Spiegel, Christian Ethics, Session 18, Animal Rights

Briefing Document: Animal Rights and Christian Ethics

Overview: This briefing document summarizes the key themes and arguments presented by Dr. James S. Spiegel in his lecture on Animal Rights within the context of Christian Ethics. The session explores the question of animal rights and the corresponding duties humans have towards animals, focusing on controversial practices like factory farming and biomedical research. Spiegel introduces and critiques prominent philosophical perspectives on animal rights (Peter Singer, Tom Regan, R.G. Fry) and presents a theological argument for animal care based on biblical principles (drawing from Andrew Tardif).

Main Themes and Important Ideas:

1. The Question of Animal Rights and Human Duties:

- The central question addressed is: "what rights, if any, do animals have? And correlatively, what sorts of duties or obligations do we have towards animals?" (p. 1)
- The most controversial areas related to animal rights are factory farming and biomedical research.

2. Factory Farming: Scale and Ethical Concerns:

- Globally, around 70 billion farm animals are bred for consumption. In the US, 99% of farm animals are factory farmed.
- The majority of antibiotics worldwide are fed to farm animals.
- 94% of Americans believe that animals bred for consumption shouldn't suffer, despite the prevalence of meat consumption.
- Factory farming is a major contributor to environmental issues, including water waste (top cause in the US), deforestation (260 million acres in the US), and agricultural emissions (40% in the US). Dairy cows globally produce 3.7 billion gallons of excrement daily.

3. Philosophical Perspectives on Animal Rights:

- **Peter Singer (Utilitarianism):** Argues in his 1975 book *Animal Liberation* that "all animals deserve equal consideration." (p. 1)

- Emphasizes that equality is a moral idea, not a factual assertion.
- Condemns "speciesism," defined as "a prejudice or attitude of bias toward the interests of members of one's own species and against those of members of other species." (p. 2)
- Posits that "The capacity for suffering and enjoyment is a prerequisite for having interests." (p. 2) If an animal can suffer, it has interests and therefore rights.
- Criticizes arbitrary distinctions like intelligence or rationality as boundaries for moral concern, noting that such criteria would exclude some humans.
- Acknowledges that while animals deserve moral consideration due to their capacity to suffer, this doesn't necessarily mean they deserve the *same* moral consideration as humans.
- **Tom Regan (Rights-Based Approach):** Argues that all animals have equal inherent value because they are "experiencing subjects of life" with basic awareness and consciousness. (p. 3)
- Believes they should be treated with respect and not reduced to the status of a thing.
- Counters the argument that only humans have inherent value due to intelligence, autonomy, and reason by pointing out that infants and mentally disabled adults also lack these to the same degree but are still considered to have inherent value.
- Spiegel critiques Regan for not demonstrating why all who have inherent value have it equally.
- **R.G. Fry (Quality of Life):** Supports the use of animals in medical research based on the "quality of life," not rights. (p. 4)
- Argues that moral standing depends on whether a creature is an "experiential subject with an unfolding series of experiences that, depending on their quality, can make the creature's life go well or badly." (p. 4)
- States that the value of a life is a function of its quality and richness of capacities.
- Believes that while animals' lives have value, they don't necessarily have the same value as a normal adult human life, arguing this isn't necessarily speciesist but based on the quality of life.

- Spiegel finds Fry's extension of this logic to potentially justify experimentation on certain human subjects problematic from a Judeo-Christian perspective.

4. Theological Argument for Vegetarianism (Andrew Tardif):

- Argues for an obligation to vegetarianism based on the "principle of double effect" and the "hierarchy of being." (p. 4-5)
- The principle of double effect suggests it's unlawful to allow a grave evil for a relatively insignificant good if the good can be achieved without the evil. "even if a good outweighs the evil in question, the action is unlawful if...the good effect could have been secured without the evil effect." (p. 5)
- The hierarchy of being places beings in order of value and worth (inanimate nature to microscopic organisms, insects, fish, amphibians, reptiles, mammals, humans, angelic order, God). Humans are higher than animals, which are higher than plants.
- Tardif argues that if one can serve their ends by killing plants instead of animals (which are ontically superior), then killing animals is unnecessary violence.
- "anyone who could live well on a vegetarian diet would, other things being equal, be obliged to adopt it because this option would secure the greatest goods of his life and health while doing the least amount of evil." (p. 5)
- He contends that a vegetarian diet is at least as nutritious as an omnivorous one and that in developed countries, non-animal food products are readily available.
- Addresses objections:
 - **Pleasure:** The pleasure of eating meat is not great enough to justify cruel treatment, especially with the availability of delicious meat-free alternatives (Spiegel mentions the Impossible Whopper as an example).
 - **Economic:** Economic upheaval would only occur with an abrupt shift to vegetarianism, but the change is happening gradually, allowing markets to adjust.

5. Biblical Arguments for Animal Care:

- **Divine Ownership:** God owns everything, including animals. "The earth is the Lord's and everything in it." (Psalm 24:1, quoted on p. 7) Disrespect towards animals is indirect disrespect towards God.
- **Divine Commands:** Scripture provides specific directives for animal care:

- Sabbath rest for animals (Exodus 23).
- Not muzzling an ox while it treads grain (Deuteronomy 25:4).
- "The righteous care for the needs of their animals." (Proverbs 12:10, p. 8) Spiegel uses his care for his chickens as an example.
- **Hierarchy of Being:** While acknowledging the hierarchy, it implies respecting each organism according to its place. We don't hesitate to swat a fly but would be horrified by the casual killing of a dog.

6. A Two-Fold Moral Duty Towards Animals (Spiegel's Conclusion):

- Even without declaring animals have "rights," we have a duty to care for them respectfully of God (they are "God's pets," p. 9). This includes minimizing pain and suffering in hunting and avoiding support for inherently cruel systems in meat production (e.g., factory farms). Supporting "free-range" options or abstaining from meat are suggested.
- The second duty is to treat animals appropriately to their nature as conscious beings with needs and the capacity to suffer.
- This consideration should prompt adjustments in buying and eating behavior and a reconsideration of supporting factory farms, circuses that train animals cruelly, trapping, and painful animal research for non-essential products like cosmetics.
- Spiegel highlights examples of cruel practices in circuses (training via electrical prods) and cosmetic testing on animals (rabbits with substances in their eyes).
- He recommends looking into product sourcing and labels (e.g., "free-range").
- He mentions resources like the Christian Vegetarian Association, Jesus People for Animals, and Every Living Thing, highlighting a balanced biblical statement on animal welfare he signed.

Conclusion:

Dr. Spiegel's session provides a comprehensive overview of the ethical considerations surrounding animal rights from both philosophical and Christian perspectives. He highlights the significant scale and inherent cruelty of factory farming, explores various arguments for animal rights and welfare, and ultimately grounds a call for responsible animal care in biblical principles of divine ownership and specific commands. While not explicitly endorsing animal "rights" in the stronger philosophical sense, Spiegel advocates for a serious consideration of animal welfare, leading to potential adjustments in consumption habits and support for industries that impact animals.

4. Study Guide: Spiegel, Christian Ethics, Session 18, Animal Rights

Animal Rights: A Study Guide

Quiz

1. According to Peter Singer, what is the foundational principle for granting equal consideration to animals, and why does he argue against using intelligence or rationality as the primary criterion?
2. Explain Tom Regan's concept of inherent value in relation to animal rights. How does he respond to the objection that only humans possess the requisite intelligence, autonomy, and reason for inherent value?
3. How does R.G. Fry justify the use of animals in biomedical research, and on what basis does he differentiate the moral standing of animals from that of normal adult humans? What potential criticism is raised regarding Fry's view on human experimentation?
4. Describe Andrew Tardif's theological argument for vegetarianism, incorporating the principle of double effect and the hierarchy of being. What is his stance on killing animals for food when plant-based alternatives are available?
5. What are some of the objections raised against vegetarianism (e.g., pleasure, economics), and how does Tardif respond to these counterarguments?
6. Discuss the biblical basis for animal care as presented in the lecture. What key principles or commands from scripture highlight our duties towards animals?
7. Explain the two-fold moral duty towards animals proposed in the lecture, even for those who do not fully endorse the concept of animal rights. What practical implications does this duty have?
8. Provide examples of controversial practices involving animals mentioned in the lecture that raise ethical concerns. Briefly explain why these practices are considered problematic from an animal welfare perspective.
9. According to the lecture, what factors should individuals consider when making choices about consuming animal products or supporting industries that utilize animals?

10. What are some of the resources mentioned in the lecture for those interested in learning more about animal welfare from a Christian perspective?

Answer Key

1. Singer argues that the capacity for suffering and enjoyment is the prerequisite for having interests, and therefore for deserving equal consideration. He rejects intelligence or rationality as the primary criterion because using such measures would arbitrarily exclude some animals while potentially including some animals over humans with cognitive disabilities or infants, leading to inconsistencies.
2. Regan argues that all animals who are "experiencing subjects of life" possess equal inherent value simply by virtue of their awareness and consciousness. He counters the intelligence/autonomy objection by pointing out that many humans (infants, severely mentally disabled individuals) lack these qualities but are still recognized as having inherent value, suggesting that the criterion should be extended to similar animals.
3. Fry justifies animal research based on the "quality of life" of a creature, arguing that moral standing depends on being an experiential subject whose life can go well or badly. He differentiates humans by claiming their lives typically have a higher quality due to richer capacities, not simply their species. A criticism is that Fry's logic could potentially justify experimentation on humans with significantly diminished quality of life.
4. Tardif argues for vegetarianism based on the principle of double effect, stating that a grave evil (killing animals) should not be allowed for an insignificant good (eating meat when alternatives exist). Drawing on the hierarchy of being, he posits that killing ontically superior animals for food when plants can suffice constitutes unnecessary violence.
5. Objections include the pleasure derived from eating meat and the potential for economic upheaval if everyone became vegetarian. Tardif counters that delicious meat-free options exist, diminishing the significance of pleasure, and that the shift to vegetarianism would likely be gradual, allowing markets to adjust without causing economic disaster.
6. The lecture highlights divine ownership (God owns all creation, including animals), specific commands (Sabbath rest for animals in Exodus, not muzzling oxen in Deuteronomy, the righteous caring for animals in Proverbs), and the

hierarchy of being as biblical foundations for animal care. These suggest a duty of humane treatment and respect for animals as part of God's creation.

7. The two-fold duty involves caring for animals respectfully as God's creatures and treating them appropriately according to their nature as conscious beings capable of suffering. This implies making more ethical consumer choices, such as supporting free-range products or abstaining from meat, and reconsidering support for inherently cruel practices like factory farms and abusive entertainment.
8. Examples include factory farming (cruel conditions and mass processing), circuses (unnatural and often abusively trained animals), trapping (prolonged suffering in traps), and cosmetic testing on animals (unnecessary suffering for non-essential products). These practices raise ethical concerns due to the pain, suffering, and disrespect inflicted upon sentient beings.
9. Individuals should consider divine ownership, the inherent capacity of animals to suffer, the availability of alternative food sources, and the potential for cruelty in the production and use of animal products. The lecture encourages supporting humane practices and avoiding those that cause unnecessary suffering.
10. The online resources mentioned are the Christian Vegetarian Association, Jesus People for Animals, and the Every Living Thing organization. The lecture also references a balanced, biblical statement on animal welfare and ethics of animal treatment that the speaker signed.

Essay Format Questions

1. Compare and contrast Peter Singer's utilitarian approach to animal rights with Tom Regan's rights-based approach. What are the strengths and weaknesses of each perspective in arguing for the moral consideration of animals?
2. Analyze the theological arguments presented for animal care and vegetarianism. How do concepts like divine ownership, specific biblical commands, and the hierarchy of being inform our ethical responsibilities towards animals?
3. Evaluate the ethics of using animals in biomedical research, considering the arguments presented by both animal rights advocates and those who defend such practices. What criteria or considerations should guide our decisions in this complex area?

4. Discuss the practical implications of adopting a more serious consideration of animal welfare in contemporary society. How might this impact our food choices, entertainment, and other interactions with animals?
5. Critically assess the concept of "speciesism" as defined by Peter Singer. Is it a valid analogy to racism and sexism, and how does acknowledging or rejecting speciesism shape our understanding of animal rights and our moral duties towards non-human beings?

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Animal Rights:** The philosophical idea that animals have fundamental rights, similar to those of humans, such as the right to life, freedom from suffering, and freedom from exploitation.
- **Speciesism:** A prejudice or attitude of bias toward the interests of members of one's own species and against those of members of other species (coined by Peter Singer).
- **Factory Farming:** A system of intensive animal agriculture where large numbers of animals are kept indoors in confined conditions, often leading to concerns about animal welfare.
- **Inherent Value:** The intrinsic worth or value that a being possesses simply by virtue of what it is, independent of its usefulness to others (a concept emphasized by Tom Regan).
- **Utilitarianism:** An ethical theory that determines right and wrong based on the consequences of actions, aiming to maximize overall happiness or well-being (Peter Singer's approach to animal ethics is rooted in this).
- **Principle of Double Effect:** An ethical principle used to evaluate actions that have both good and bad effects. It requires that the good effect be intended, the bad effect not be the means to the good, the action itself be morally good or neutral, and the good effect outweigh the bad.
- **Hierarchy of Being:** A philosophical and theological concept that posits a ranked order of existence, with beings differing in terms of their value and perfection (used in Tardif's argument).

- **Animal Welfare:** The concern for the well-being of animals, encompassing their physical health, mental state, and the conditions in which they live and die.
- **Free-Range:** A method of farming husbandry where the animals, for at least part of the day, can roam freely outdoors.
- **Sentience:** The capacity to experience feelings and sensations, such as pleasure and pain. This is often considered a key factor in determining moral consideration for animals.

5. FAQs on Spiegel, Christian Ethics, Session 18, Animal Rights, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Frequently Asked Questions: Animal Rights and Christian Ethics

1. What is the central question when discussing animal rights in Christian ethics, and what practices bring this question to the forefront? The central question is: what rights, if any, do animals have, and consequently, what duties or obligations do humans have towards them? This question is particularly highlighted by the practices of factory farming and biomedical research, both of which raise significant ethical concerns regarding the treatment of animals.

2. What is Peter Singer's argument for animal rights, and what key concept does he introduce? Peter Singer argues that all animals deserve equal consideration based on their capacity to suffer. He introduces the concept of "speciesism," which he defines as a prejudice or bias in favor of the interests of one's own species and against those of other species. He contends that just as we condemn racism and sexism, we should also condemn speciesism, as the ability to suffer, not intelligence or rationality, is the prerequisite for having interests and therefore rights.

3. How does Tom Regan's approach to animal rights differ from Singer's, and what is his core belief? Tom Regan's argument differs from Singer's utilitarian approach by asserting that all animals possess equal inherent value simply because they are "experiencing subjects of life" with a basic awareness and state of consciousness. He believes that this inherent value necessitates treating all such beings with respect and not reducing them to the status of mere things.

4. What is R.G. Fry's perspective on the moral consideration of animals, and how does it relate to biomedical research? R.G. Fry argues that moral consideration for a creature depends on its quality of life, defined by its richness and capacity for enrichment. He believes that while animal lives have value, they generally do not have the same value as a normal adult human life. Based on this, Fry supports the use of animals in medical research aimed at improving the quality of human life, a position that raises ethical questions when considering human beings with diminished quality of life.

5. What is Andrew Tardif's theological argument for vegetarianism based on the principle of double effect and the hierarchy of being? Andrew Tardif argues for an obligation to avoid deliberately killing animals for food (or supporting it) based on the principle of double effect and the concept of a hierarchy of being in the created order. He suggests that since humans are higher on this hierarchy than animals, and animals higher than plants, we should minimize harm by choosing to sustain ourselves with plants when possible. Killing animals for food, when a vegetarian diet can provide sufficient nutrition and well-being, constitutes unnecessary violence and violates the principle that the means to a good end should not be evil if an alternative exists.

6. What are some common objections to vegetarianism, and how does Tardif address them? Common objections include the pleasure derived from eating meat and concerns about potential economic upheaval if everyone became vegetarian. Tardif counters the pleasure argument by pointing out the availability of delicious meat-free alternatives and arguing that the pleasure of eating meat does not outweigh the ethical concerns of animal suffering. Regarding the economic objection, he suggests that a shift towards vegetarianism would likely be gradual, allowing markets to adjust accordingly, as is already happening with increasing demand for vegetarian options.

7. What are some biblical principles and commands that inform a Christian perspective on animal care? From a biblical standpoint, several principles inform animal care. These include the concept of divine ownership, where God owns all creation and cruelty to animals is seen as disrespectful to God. Additionally, the Bible contains specific commands, such as extending the Sabbath rest to animals (Exodus 23), not muzzling an ox while it works (Deuteronomy 25:4), and the general principle that the righteous care for the needs of their animals (Proverbs 12:10). The hierarchy of being also suggests a responsibility to treat each creature according to its value in God's creation.

8. What practical implications might a serious consideration of animal welfare have on a person's behavior, according to the source? A serious consideration of animal welfare could lead to several practical adjustments in a person's behavior. This might include avoiding supporting factory farms by choosing free-range or humanely raised animal products, or abstaining from eating meat altogether. It would also prompt a reevaluation of supporting activities that involve animal cruelty, such as some circuses and the fur trapping industry. Furthermore, it encourages scrutiny of animal research practices, particularly when they involve significant suffering for non-essential purposes like cosmetic testing, and promotes seeking out products that are certified as cruelty-free.