

5/9/12

Reflection paper – Euthanasia

One would not allow an animal to go through what I have endured.

Chantal Sebire

The sentiment shared by the late Chantal Sebire is the main thing that confuses me about the world. Perhaps this is just a consequence of growing up without pets and thus, any significant experience with animals in my life, but I am left with this burning question: how do people rationalize feeling more empathy and civic duty towards animals than they do humans? Once this is accepted as a given, how do you *then* make the argument for guiltlessly killing animals because they might be in some level of pain? It's as though animals are afforded special kind of agency over fairness and justice, by virtue of the fact that they are silent, domesticated beings – UNTIL they reach the end of life, when humans get to decide when and how they die. If you love animals so much, why are you so comfortable with their dying without their "consent"? All the arguments that I've heard against euthanasia of humans hinge on the idea of playing God¹ or respecting the sanctity of life too much to just take it away based on probability. So ... where do these arguments go when it comes to animals? It seems to me that as a society, we are totally comfortable with deciding what kind of life is worth living when it comes to dogs and cats. Doesn't this fact innately undercut the respect and admiration that people say they reserve especially for animals?

The articles we read for today's discussion are all dealing with the notion of killing the terminally ill or severely disfigured. I'd be interested to understand how the politics of euthanasia change when we consider the same potential issues for young children – even children who are still inside the womb. Are there people against assisted suicide and "death with dignity" measures that would change their minds if they were talking about unborn babies or babies diagnosed with fatal diseases?

¹ I greatly dislike this phrase because to say that manipulating chemicals and test tubes is tantamount to God's power is to reduce God to a mere "mad scientist" figure, which He most definitely is not.

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