**‘Animals matter.’ Discuss.**

Every year, 38 million geese are slaughtered in France to make Foie Gras, a popular French delicacy. Tubes are inserted into the goose’s esophagus and it is then force-fed, causing the liver to enlarge so as to develop a richer taste for human consumption. At slaughter, they are hung upside down with their throats slit, leaving them to bleed to death. Animal activists have expressed their discontent with the process of force-feeding, but it remains as a French staple amidst the controversy. These activists believe that animals do matter, that they have rights and that their role in the global ecosystem is indispensible. On the other hand, some deem animals as subordinate to humans due to their inability to rationalize their actions.

Animals are frequently subordinated to humans in the pursuit of economic and scientific progress. Humans do not view them as equal beings and have assumed the role of the ‘master’ species—the dominant role in the food chain. This is because animals lack the ability to rationalize their actions; they simply follow their instinct and hence their inability to choose on a moral basis deprives them of their rights. As a result, animal subordination occurs, justifying the treatment of animals as a means to an end. They are treated as alternatives to possibly harmful experimentation on humans as a means to save human lives through medical breakthroughs and to increase the vigour of human life. In a study conducted at a US military facility, a pig was exposed to lethal dose of radiation. Following that, it showed signs of organ failure, depression and chronic bleeding from injection sites, and eventually died two days after the exposure to radiation. This could be considered as a form of animal cruelty, but the sacrifice of such animals is justified by the pursuit of scientific progress, aiming to improve the lives of humans. Similarly, the use of animals in the agricultural sector reflects the use of animals as tools. An example would be the water buffalo, which was bred to plough rice fields in the early years of agriculture. This reflects the use of animals as a means to an end—Man’s economic and scientific progress, justified by humans as the ‘master’ species in the food chain.

However, even though animals are unable to rationalize their actions and simply follow their instinct, this does not mean that they should be deprived of their rights. In recent years, increasing research on animal sentience has proven that animals exhibit intentional behaviours, demonstrating that humans are not the only beings capable of exhibiting consciousness. This shows that while animals follow their instinct, they are capable of exhibiting intentional behavior as well. Since the ability to apply moral reasoning forms the basis of human rights, the issue of whether animals should be entitled to similar rights thus possesses a certain degree of validity.

First, anthropomorphists believe that animals are sentient beings, and this belief forms the basis of animal rights. They believe that animals are capable of feeling the same range of emotions as humans, feeling psychological and physical pain inflicted upon them and that animals practice values similar to that of humans, such as loyalty and filial piety. Hachiko was a Japanese dog that greeted his owner at the end of each day in front of the nearby Shibuya station. Even after the death of his owner, Hachiko continued his daily ritual of waiting at the station for the next nine years. His legendary faithfulness loyalty impressed the Japanese as a spirit of family loyalty and teachers have used his vigil as an example for children to follow, and Hachiko became a symbol of national loyalty. Animal sentience thus places animals on the same level as humans, forming the basis for animal rights, and Dr. Jane Goodall was such a proponent. She advocated respect for animals based on the reasoning that animals had personalities, emotions and feelings, as proven by the decades she spent researching on chimpanzees in the Congo. However, some may argue that fighting for animals’ rights would undermine human rights as conflicts would then exist between both the existence of humans and animals. This undermines the presence of zoos as they involve restricting an animal’s freedom for the viewing pleasure of humans. Similarly, it may undermine the existence of delicacies of certain cultures, and these cultures may not be willing to ban the delicacy for the sake of preserving its rich history. Nevertheless, as long as a balance is struck between the preservation of elements of a culture and economic pursuits, it is possible for human rights to co-exist alongside human rights.

Furthermore, the role of animals in the global ecosystem should not be understated. All beings are part of nature and every action has an impact on future generations of humans, animals and even inanimate objects. The life of an animal and a human is intimately intertwined in both the social and scientific aspect. From a source of food to a lifetime companion, the role of an animal is of paramount importance in the life of human. Milk, eggs and meat, which come from animals, are staple foods for humans. Also, trained guide dogs serve as a both a loyal companion and a pair of eyes for the visually impaired. Similarly, pet animals are often used for rehabilitation, where they bring comfort and solace to patients in nursing homes. Animals should thus be respected, as humans depend on them. This is demonstrated by Buddhist monks in Nepal, who pray for the rebirth of an animal before slaughtering it for food. Values such as respect and appreciation should thus be applied to animals just as how humans apply it on one another, simply because the fates of animals and humans are intertwined. Hence animals do matter, and should be protected and respected.

Recent years have seen increased wildlife conservation efforts by humans in order to safeguard the future. Whether the basis of conservation is to safeguard resources for future generations or to respect the lives of animals, the fact that humans are dependent on animals cannot be disputed. Furthermore, with increasing research to prove animal sentience, animals are increasingly being put on the same level as humans. Even though the presence of animal rights may undermine the ethics behind animal testing, cultures and existence of zoos and aquariums, it is hoped that a balance can be struck between the protection of animal rights and the retention of such human practices.