The reason we should accept Animal Rights

Riku Murao

Currently, there is no legal code that squarely recognizes animal rights among the nations of the world. Animal welfare is gaining momentum around the world, and many nations have legislation in place to protect animals. However, the legislative intent is not based on animal rights. For example, Article 20a of the German Basic Law is interpreted as an article that obliges the state to implement animal protection measures, rather than recognizing animal rights. The legislative intent of Japan's Animal Protection Law is said to be to cultivate human sentiments by raising the public's awareness of animal protection.

There are no international treaties that officially mention animal rights, and although informal animal rights declarations are said to exist, they are not of a nature to be ratified by nations or widely adopted as guidelines by the international community. In other words, animal rights do not exist in the world. The current conclusion is that rights can only be enjoyed by human beings.

When discussing animal rights, animal rights theorists often focus on the unclear grounds on which rights are granted only to humans. This is no doubt another important point of contention in the discussion of animal rights.

However, the argument that "it is unreasonable that the subject enjoyment of rights is limited to humans, and that animals should also be granted rights" may only cause conflicts of opinion within human society, and in fact, may end up hindering the promotion of animal rights.

Therefore, in this paper, I would like to examine the issue from the viewpoint of whether recognizing animal rights is necessary for human society.

In other words, we will discuss animal rights in terms of their benefits and indispensability to humans.

I am personally unwilling to take such a cut. This is because I am convinced that animals are not human tools, but individual lives with independent agency, that animals have ethical rights regardless of their benefit to humans, and that our continued exploitation of them without recognizing their animal rights is completely evil.

However, ethical rights are only an ideological entity, and their mere existence means nothing. Rights are effective only when they have legislation.

And it is the legal norms of human society and the human power to realize them in accordance with those legal norms that make rights effective.

Therefore, it is a fact that rights are held by human beings in human society, who hold both the right to legislate and the right to realize them. When we consider rights, we must be aware that we must ultimately establish the norm of rights as the legal norm of human society.

Humanity has created the concept of rights. I believe that rights exist, in the first sense, to guarantee us the ultimate interest of living.

First, I will discuss why rights are limited to human beings. In Europe, the emergence of rights is largely due to the idea of a counterweight to the tyranny of the king and a counterweight of the common man against the privileged class. In other words, rights are expected to play a role in maintaining order in society as a whole by regulating the relationship between the state and the people and between the people within human society. In this sense, rights were not originally intended to be applied to animals.

So why did the concept and discussion of animal rights spring up? By developing a code of rights, we have liberated vulnerable human beings who had previously been exploited for their life and physical freedom. However, when we look at the exploitation of animals in human society, we find a reality that is no less cruel than slavery, or even more inescapable than slavery in human history, considering that the slaughter of livestock is a predetermined outcome from the moment of birth.

Nature and man are at odds with each other. Nature takes human life with impunity, and we have always been frightened by the raids of ferocious predators. At this point, human society may not need to consider animal rights. Even if ethical rights are worthy of consideration, legal rights would be difficult to take into account.

However, times have changed, and nature has become an object that can be altered, exploited, and manipulated by humans to suit their own convenience. Animals, too, have been assigned a value in human society as tools to be controlled and exploited, and have thus been transformed from life into objects.

Domestic animals and pets are the descendants of animals that humans have forcibly brought into human society from the natural system. It is unethical to discriminate against, abuse, and slaughter these animals while incorporating them into one's own society. In an age when the production, management, and slaughter of animals has become automated, and meat can be found in supermarkets around the world, it is staggering to consider how many animals are killed each day for human desire. Already humans and animals are in a relationship of complete domination and exploitation. This is no different than the evils of discrimination and slavery that humans try to overcome. The fact that there are many people who have lost patience with the treatment of animals in human society is the best proof that animal rights are worth discussing.

And it may be important to note that the maturation of scholarship has provided us with the certainty that animals also have consciousness, thought, and sensation. Some animal rights advocates try to make consciousness, intelligence, or the sense of pain a theoretical basis for the enjoyment of rights.

However, in the current situation, animals still remain inferior creatures in terms of intelligence and value in people's perception. Any attempt to give animals rights would invite objections that it would diminish the value of human rights, and backlash from the many interests that have benefited from animal exploitation by giving animals rights, or from the international economy.

Just as we cannot eliminate discrimination, persecution, slavery, and war while decrying them as evils, cruelty to animals cannot be solved overnight either. It is only natural that there are objections.

For example, emancipation was not a profitable decision for the ruling class and for the economic sphere supported by slave labor. But it was rightly voiced and won. It seems to me that human rights of all kinds have been established by a similar history.

However, the downside of acquiring animal rights is that the animals themselves cannot claim their rights and make revolutions in accordance with the ways of human society. In order for animal rights to be valid in human society, which dominates the earth, they must be acquired by humans. It must be led by human beings who represent the claims of animals.

But the method of agency is not without practicality. Just as the French Revolution, which upheld the rights of the common man, was led by many aristocrats and clergy, it seems to me that it is not impossible for people who love righteousness and justice to come together to represent the claims of animals and work toward the acquisition of animal rights, even if there is no benefit to humans.

But animal rights are not without merit. Rather, from the perspective of the entire organism and the planet as a whole, the acquisition of animal rights has tremendous advantages over keeping the rights in the hands of humans.

And even from the perspective of human society alone, the benefits are significant.

The first is that respect for life permeates human society as a major social principle. Human dignity is guaranteed by human rights. We cannot have our lives or bodies violated unnecessarily. However, the reality is that wars continue to ravage the world. Why is it that life, which should be respected above all else, is turned into a chess piece for the interests of the state? Why is it that life, which is supposed to be respected above all else, is driven to war and forced to die by the voice of a dictator? One reason is the lack of thorough respect for life in current human society. Human rights provide strong guarantees for life in times of peace, but in times of emergency, the priority of respect for life is lowered. This is because the sanctity of life is not the main principle. The main principle of human society is human dignity. What is human dignity? For example, it may be human dignity to defend one's homeland. And there is no room for human dignity for those who invade their homeland. An aggressor is an inhuman being. Then war would not be forbidden. For it is transformed into a war for dignity. People will fight and die to defend their homeland. There is no escaping this consequence in a state where human dignity trumps the sanctity of life.

But the affairs of the state are essentially none of our business individually. We just happen to be born in a certain place, which happens to be the territory of a certain country, and our ancestors may happen to have roots in a certain place. Before that, we are the Homo sapiens species, and we are life on Earth. We inherently belong to everything and to nothing. We are merely bound by ideology. By nature, we do not need to kill each other, we do not need to take from each other. What stands in the way of this is the idea of rights, which places the highest importance on things other than life. In the rights philosophy, the basis should be the sanctity of life. The value of life should be placed above all other things. This turns unjust slaughter, war, and other cruelty to us into the most unforgivable things on earth.

Why, then, is the dignity of life not considering a major principle of rights? It is because our society operates through the daily genocide of life. While there continue to be many practical challenges, including economic, we must understand that the best way to achieve real justice and real happiness is to decide that the dignity of life is at the core of our rights.

Second, there is the danger of drawing a line. What is a "human being" as a subject who enjoys rights? Human history has a history of discrimination. The white race regarded the yellow race as the descendants of apes and the black race as the descendants of gorillas. In the modern era, many uneducated white races may have seriously discriminated against other human beings as being similar to animals, not human beings. Such yellow and black races are now part of the "human" race. Is this because it has been scientifically determined that Asians and Africans are also homo sapiens species? But the problem is that humans are not a pure Homo sapiens species. About 15% of their genotype is inherited from the subraces. This makes Europeans, Asians, and Africans not entirely the same species. If a dictator arbitrarily draws a line in the future society between Caucasoids and Aryans as "human beings," we will cease to be human beings. In other words, we will be deprived of the human rights that only human beings are entitled to enjoy.

Let's take an incident that happened in Japan. An employee of a nursing home for the mentally handicapped killed several handicapped people. He called out to each one and killed those who were not capable of responding to his call as if they were not "human". He told the court, "Those without intelligence are not human beings. In fact, under the Japanese Penal Code, the state does not treat the mentally handicapped as human beings, even though they are not responsible for their crimes. What is the difference?” In his mind, those with intelligence or reason are human beings, and the rest may have been regarded as beasts in human form. This also shows the danger of drawing a line between the scope of rights and "human beings”.

The line of human beings is very vague. The fact that the subject of the enjoyment of rights is determined by the arbitrary line drawn by human beings shows the instability of the enjoyment of rights. We cannot deny the possibility that human rights may suddenly disappear from us one day. By simply making life the condition of rights, at least we human beings will not suddenly be excluded from the scope of rights one day. Even in this self-protective sense, extending the scope of rights to all living things has great merit.

Finally, animal rights should be recognized as a global environmental protection measure.

Our world is in crisis. Since the Industrial Revolution, human over-exploitation and exploitation of nature have resulted in climate change, resource depletion, and other threats to even the human habitat. The damage caused by human destruction has reached a point where it is difficult to restore the environment to its original state, even with nature's self-healing capabilities. Human beings have begun to realize their own mistakes and have recently begun to seek coexistence with nature under the SDGs. However, the SDGs have yet to fully grasp the sense of crisis. The slogan is not to quit development and exploitation for human convenience, but to use nature-friendly alternatives in a moderate manner when available. Humans are still in the process of claiming ownership over all the resources on the planet. We also need to rethink our relationship with animals. Nature is formed by the interconnectedness of the diverse organisms that live there, and because humans have gone around destroying nature, the ecosystems that form the basis of nature have also collapsed. This is due to the fact that humans have neglected nature and animals. In order for humans to continue to survive on the Earth, nature must be restored. This requires respect and reverence for ecosystems and the creatures within them. The stage of viewing animals as objects to be used, managed, and exploited is long gone. This respect and esteem is not limited to wild animals, but also applies to animals that have unfortunately been incorporated into human society as tools. We must now change our relationship with natural systems and non-human organisms to avoid a future of destruction. Animal rights can be linked to this merit of preservation of the human species and of the Earth's nature, the mother of humankind.

These three points are the benefits that animal rights should be recognized and animal rights should be enshrined in legislation. All of these are very big picture benefits, but they are benefits that are far more valuable than immediate economic or pleasure benefits. An accurate analysis of the reality of the treatment of animals in human society and a big-picture discussion of the changes in human society caused by the idea of animal rights are essential to the realization of animal rights.