

## Acceptance speech

20 June 2023

### **Peter Singer**, awardee in the Humanities and Social Sciences category (15th edition)

I am delighted to receive the BBVA Foundation Frontiers of Knowledge Award in the Humanities. I thank the Foundation and all those involved in this award for their support of the humanities.

It is particularly apt that I am sharing this award with Steven Pinker. We don't agree on everything, but we share some extremely important beliefs: first, that seeking evidence and applying our ability to reason is the only reliable way to gain knowledge, and to make progress towards a better world. Second, we oppose the narrowing of public debate that has succeeded in denying platforms to some thinkers with controversial views. Regrettably, some university administrations have bowed to uninformed campaigns, disciplining, suspending, and in some cases even dismissing their own academic staff. For this reason I have, together with Francesca Minerva and Jeff McMahan, co-founded the *Journal of Controversial Ideas*, a peer-reviewed academic journal that allows authors to publish under a pseudonym, if they so desire, and will not refuse to publish articles because they are controversial.

When *Animal Liberation* was first published in 1975, it was greeted with hostility and even ridicule. Hence it is gratifying to have my work on animals recognized, as it is in the BBVA Foundation citation, as providing a basis for extending ethics to animals.

I believe that, just as we now reject the blatant racism of Europeans during the era of slavery, and the overt sexism of men over women until quite recent times, so we should reject the ideology of speciesism that allows us ruthlessly to exploit non-human animals. We need to recognize speciesism as an ideology that serves what we regard as our interests, but at an enormous cost to the hundreds of billions of animals we exploit. Animals were not put here on Earth for us to use and there is no reason why all humans should have rights, for example, not to be tortured, but animals should be denied them. The only

defensible ethical principle for governing our relations with other sentient beings is one of equal consideration for similar interests. Pain is pain, no matter the species of the one who is experiencing it, and we are not justified in ignoring it or discounting it because it is not the pain of a member of our species.

The citation also refers to my work as having “major consequences for international animal welfare legislation as well as for moral progress.” In *Animal Liberation Now*, published this month, I review the progress that has been made for animals over the past 50 years. In the European Union, including of course here in Spain, it is now illegal to crowd hens into bare wire cages in which they cannot spread their wings. Similarly, veal calves and pigs can no longer be held in individual stalls too narrow for them even to turn around.

This is progress, but no form of industrial animal production that confines animals indoors all their lives and breaks up their family bonds gives them an adequate life. Regrettably, factory farming is still growing in some countries, and especially in China, with catastrophic consequences for animals, the climate, and the environment more generally. There is still a great deal of work to be done, to protect animals. I hope that Europe will continue to move forward in its protection of animals, and will set an example for other countries to follow.

In conclusion, I would like to return to the humanities, and in particular to the branch of the humanities in which I work, namely philosophy. Philosophy is a remarkable discipline. It is well known that it teaches people to think more clearly, and that this is a skill that is useful in many areas of life. But philosophy, or more specifically, ethics, can do much more than that. Over the years I have received hundreds of emails from people telling me that my work has changed their lives. Some have changed their career plans in order to do more to assist people living in extreme poverty. Others have changed what they eat, no longer eating meat, or ceasing to eat any animal products. One or two of them have even donated a kidney to a complete stranger. Is there any other area of study that can have such a profound effect on the lives of those who take part in it?