



'Point and Kill' vs Animal Rights: A Moral Examination

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Abstract: This study critically examines the ethical implications of the practice known as "point and kill," wherein nonhuman animals are selected and immediately killed for food, a practice that has become commonplace in many African cultures. While food is essential for the survival and growth of both human and nonhuman animals, the manner in which nonhuman animals are often treated as mere commodities raises significant ethical concerns. Despite extensive debates in contemporary animal ethics, the focus has predominantly been on issues such as biomedical research, animal confinement, and entertainment, with relatively little attention given to the ethical ramifications of using animals for food, particularly in the context of practices like "point and kill." This paper addresses the gap in the literature by interrogating the moral worth of nonhuman animals and questioning the justification for their wanton killing for human consumption. Employing critical and conceptual analysis, the study draws on the Igbo philosophy of 'ugwu anu' (animal integrity) to argue against speciesism and advocate for the moral consideration of nonhuman animals. It contends that nonhuman animals deserve care, respect, and fair treatment, and that the practice of "point and kill" reflects a speciesist attitude that undermines the inherent value of animal life. By bringing this issue to the forefront, the study contributes to the broader discourse on animal ethics and calls for a reevaluation of culturally ingrained practices that perpetuate animal suffering.

Keywords: Animal Rights, Point and Kill, Speciesism, Moral Consideration.

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INTRODUCTION

Animal ethics is an interdisciplinary field that explores the moral aspects of human-animal relationships, focusing on topics such as animal rights, welfare, speciesism, and wildlife conservation. Central to this discourse is the question of whether nonhuman animals possess moral worth and what obligations humans have towards them. While much of the discussion has historically centered on biomedical research, zoos, and entertainment, the ethical considerations surrounding the use of animals for food—particularly the practice of "point and kill," where an animal is selected and immediately killed for consumption—have received less attention.

In many African cultures, "point and kill" is a widely accepted norm, rooted in tradition but raising significant ethical concerns. This practice, common in countries like Nigeria, Kenya, and Ghana, challenges contemporary views on animal welfare by rapidly transforming a living being into a meal with little consideration for its suffering. The practice reflects a broader societal issue where the moral status of animals is often overshadowed by cultural and culinary traditions.

The Igbo philosophy of 'ugwu anu' (animal integrity) offers a culturally relevant perspective, advocating for the care and moral consideration of

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nonhuman animals. This philosophy challenges speciesist attitudes that justify the exploitation of animals based on their perceived inferiority to humans. As African societies evolve, traditional practices like "point and kill" are increasingly questioned in light of modern ethical standards.

This paper critically examines the "point and kill" practice within the context of animal ethics, focusing on the moral implications of killing animals wantonly for food and the ethical challenges of their immediate killing for consumption. By engaging with the philosophical framework of 'ugwu anu' and contemporary animal ethics debates, this study aims to advocate for a more compassionate and ethical approach to human-animal relationships.

Historical Progression of Animal Care: A Summary

The relationship between humans and animals, particularly regarding the use of animals for food, has been a topic of ethical debate since antiquity. Ancient societies held varied views on the moral status of animals. In ancient Egypt, for instance, animals were revered as divine manifestations, with certain animals even being considered sacred, such as cats, whose killing was a capital offense [1]. This reverence extended to ethical considerations, as seen in the "Book of the Dead," which condemned cruelty to animals as a sin jeopardizing one's afterlife.

In contrast, ancient Greek thinkers offered diverse perspectives on animal ethics. Pythagoras and his followers advocated for vegetarianism, viewing the killing of animals for food as morally wrong due to a perceived kinship between humans and animals [2]. However, Aristotle, one of the most influential Greek philosophers, argued that animals, lacking reason, were outside the scope of moral consideration and existed primarily for human use [3]. This view, later adopted and propagated by Christian thinkers like Augustine and Aquinas, deeply influenced Western attitudes toward animals, justifying their exploitation for human needs.

The medieval period reflected a complex interplay between compassion and exploitation in human attitudes toward animals. While animals were often exploited for food and labor, they were also integrated into human society in various ways, including being kept as pets, tried in courts, and subjected to religious rituals. However, thinkers like St. Thomas Aquinas reinforced the idea that animals were instruments for human use, contributing to a growing separation between humans and animals in moral and spiritual terms [4].

The Renaissance period marked a significant shift in the perception of animals, driven by the rise of humanism and the emphasis on human

superiority. This era saw an increase in the exploitation of animals, justified by scientific curiosity and philosophical arguments like those of René Descartes, who claimed that animals lacked souls and therefore could not experience pain [5]. Despite this, some voices during the Renaissance, like Thomas More and John Locke, expressed concern for animal welfare, advocating for more humane treatment.

The eighteenth century saw the emergence of a more organized discourse on animal rights, particularly through the work of Jeremy Bentham. Bentham argued for the extension of rights to animals based on their capacity to suffer, laying the groundwork for modern animal rights movements. For him, 'the question is not, can they reason? Nor, can they talk? But can they suffer?' [6]. His views were echoed by various poets and clerics who opposed animal cruelty.

These efforts culminated in the early twentieth century with legislative action, most notably the 1911 animal protection act in the United Kingdom. This legislation made it a criminal offense to cause unnecessary suffering to animals, marking a significant milestone in the protection of animal welfare and influencing similar reforms worldwide [7].

This historical progression reflects a long and evolving discourse on the moral status of animals, where shifts in philosophical thought, cultural practices, and legislative actions have shaped the complex relationship between humans and animals.

Speciesism and Anti-Speciesism

In virtually all societies, there is a prevailing belief that nonhuman animals lack intrinsic moral worth and are primarily to be used to serve human interests. This perspective has been used to justify extensive exploitation, suffering, and mistreatment of animals. This raises important ethical questions: Do animals possess any moral worth or standing? Should they be treated with care and respect by humans? These questions are especially relevant in practices where animals are pointed at and immediately killed for food, a common scenario in many cultures.

The contemporary debates on animal ethics are deeply rooted in fundamental disagreements about underlying ethical theories. Peter Singer, a prominent philosopher in this field, argues for the equal consideration of interests between human and nonhuman animals. According to Singer, our concern for others should not depend on their species, abilities, or characteristics. He contends that the mere fact that animals are not members of our species does

not justify exploiting them. Similarly, the lower intelligence of animals compared to humans does not justify disregarding their interests [8]. Singer's view highlights a significant flaw in our shared morality: while it offers substantial protection to humans against intolerable treatment, it is far less protective of nonhuman animals.

This disparity in treatment reflects a widespread prejudice known as speciesism. Singer defines speciesism as a prejudice or attitude of bias towards the interest of members of one's own species and against those of members of other species [9]. In his view, speciesism is an unjust attitude, akin to racism or sexism, that prioritizes the human species and disregards the moral consideration of nonhuman species.

Singer's anti-speciesist perspective is grounded in the principle of equal consideration of interests, which is a utilitarian approach emphasizing the significance of sentience—the capacity to experience pain or pleasure. The principle of equal consideration of interest states that we should give equal consideration in our moral deliberations to the like interests of all those affected by our actions [10]. Since animals are sentient beings, they should be placed on similar moral footings as humans when it comes to their interests.

Furthermore, the German philosopher Immanuel Kant navigates between a speciesist and a soft anti-speciesist stance in his ethical views. From the speciesist perspective, Kant argues that humans are superior to animals because humans possess rationality and self-consciousness, qualities that nonhuman animals lack. As a result, Kant asserts that animals have no inherent moral worth and are merely means to human ends, existing primarily for human benefit. However, leaning towards a soft anti-speciesist view, Kant acknowledges that cruelty to animals is wrong, though not out of concern for the animals themselves. Instead, he argues that such cruelty can desensitize individuals to suffering and lead to moral degradation in human relationships [11].

The debate between speciesism and anti-speciesism remains a significant point of contention in animal ethics. Speciesists, like Kant, maintain that humans' rationality and self-consciousness justify the prioritization of human interests over those of animals. In contrast, anti-speciesists, following Singer's line of thought, argue that sentience, not rationality, should be the basis for moral consideration, advocating for the equal treatment of all sentient beings.

This paper critically examines both perspectives, with a stronger inclination towards the anti-speciesist view. The anti-speciesist position challenges the common practice of merely pointing at an animal, such as a catfish in a pond, and transforming it into food without considering its moral worth. By advocating for the equal consideration of interests, the anti-speciesist stance calls for a reevaluation of our ethical responsibilities towards nonhuman animals, urging us to move beyond speciesist biases and towards a more inclusive and compassionate moral framework.

Point and Kill: A Cultural and Ethical Examination

In traditional African societies, the act of pointing—typically using the index finger—holds significant cultural meaning. Pointing is a universal gesture used to indicate or draw attention to phenomena, but in many African cultures, this seemingly innocuous act is laden with implications that go beyond mere indication. Depending on the context, pointing can carry both positive and negative connotations, and these implications vary across different cultural settings.

Cultural Significance of Pointing

In many African traditions, there are strict cultural norms governing when and how one can point, especially when it involves other people. According to Mbiti (1990), African societies place a strong emphasis on respect and hierarchy, particularly in interactions between younger and older individuals. For example, it is often considered disrespectful for a younger person to point directly at an elder. This gesture, when directed at someone with whom the pointer is not well acquainted, can be seen as a sign of impudence or even a veiled insult [12]. The "pointer"—the person making the gesture—thus wields a subtle yet powerful tool of communication, one that can either foster understanding or cause offense.

In addition to the social implications, pointing can also carry an element of caution or threat. Adegbola (2017) notes that in many African cultures, pointing and flicking the index finger towards someone is often interpreted as a serious warning. This gesture can be seen as an escalation of conflict, potentially leading to violence if not carefully managed. As a result, such actions are usually avoided in social interactions, as they are seen as harbingers of discord that require immediate attention to prevent further escalation [13].

Symbolic and Superstitious Beliefs

Beyond social interactions, pointing also intersects with superstitions and beliefs tied to life, growth, and fertility. In some African farming communities, for instance, it is believed that pointing

at a newly sprouted plant—referred to as a plumule—can cause the plant to wither and die [14]. This belief underscores the deep connection between gestures and the life forces that sustain both humans and nature. Similarly, pointing at a pregnant woman or her protruding belly is generally frowned upon, as it is thought to bring bad luck or harm to the unborn child [15].

These beliefs reflect a broader cultural understanding that pointing can be an act of ill-will, associated with death, destruction, and the cessation of life. Such negative connotations of pointing are deeply ingrained in many African societies, where they are treated as moral and ethical considerations [16]. The idea that a simple gesture can carry the weight of life and death adds a layer of complexity to the act of pointing, transforming it from a mere physical action into a potent symbol with moral implications.

The Ethical Dilemma of "Point and Kill"

In contemporary African societies, however, the term "Point and Kill" has taken on a more literal and commercial meaning, particularly in the context of food consumption. The phrase has become synonymous with the practice of selecting a live animal—often a catfish or bush meat—in restaurants or eateries, which is then immediately slaughtered and prepared as a meal [17]. In this context, the act of pointing has shifted from a symbolic gesture to a direct act of selecting an animal for death, transforming the ethical implications of pointing into a matter of life and death.

This practice raises several ethical questions, particularly when viewed through the lens of traditional beliefs about the power of pointing. While some may argue that "Point and Kill" is simply a cultural practice that reflects the human need for sustenance, others may view it as a morally problematic act that reduces living beings to mere objects of consumption [18]. The juxtaposition of traditional superstitions with modern-day practices highlights the tension between cultural heritage and contemporary realities.

Ugwu Anu (Animal Integrity): An Ethico-Philosophical Reflection

The concept of "Ugwu Anu," rooted in Igbo culture, offers a profound perspective on the ethical treatment of animals. Translated as "Animal Integrity," Ugwu Anu challenges the anthropocentric view that animals exist solely for human use, instead advocating for a recognition of their inherent dignity and moral worth. This concept pushes us to reconsider the often-unquestioned assumption that animals are mere resources to be exploited,

suggesting a more holistic and respectful relationship between humans and nonhuman animals.

Ugwu Anu is more than just a cultural tradition; it represents a deeply philosophical stance on the nature of moral consideration. It posits that animals are not simply tools or commodities, but beings with their own intrinsic value, deserving of respect and ethical treatment. This view aligns with broader ethical theories, such as those proposed by Immanuel Kant and the anti-speciesist movement, which argue that moral consideration should extend beyond mere utility to encompass the inherent worth of all sentient beings.

In Igbo culture, this respect for animal integrity is reflected in various proverbs, myths, and practices that discourage the unnecessary harm of animals. For example, the prohibition against killing pregnant or mating animals suggests an understanding of animals as beings with their own life cycles and social structures, deserving of protection and care. Such cultural norms offer a stark contrast to the often-exploitative practices seen in modern societies, where animals are frequently reduced to objects of consumption with little regard for their welfare.

Critically, Ugwu Anu invites us to question the ethical frameworks that dominate contemporary animal-human relationships. It challenges the dichotomy between human and nonhuman animals, urging a recognition of the interconnectedness of all life forms. This perspective resonates with ecological ethics and the idea of a moral community that includes all living beings, not just humans.

Philosophically, Ugwu Anu can be seen as a call to expand the moral circle, to include animals as subjects of moral consideration. It confronts the ethical implications of our actions towards animals and demands a reevaluation of practices that diminish their integrity. By embracing Ugwu Anu, we acknowledge the complexity and richness of animal life, and the moral responsibilities that come with our shared existence on this planet.

Ugwu Anu is a concept that challenges us to think critically about the ethical treatment of animals. It urges us to move beyond exploitative practices and towards a more compassionate and respectful approach, recognizing the intrinsic value and integrity of all living beings. This philosophical stance not only enriches our understanding of animal ethics but also calls for a more just and humane world.

The Apologies of Being a "Point and Kill" Animal

A "Point and Kill" animal is a creature reduced to a mere object of convenience—a quick

delicacy selected and consumed at the mere gesture of a pointing finger. This practice, deeply rooted in cultural and philosophical traditions, reflects a broader issue: the systematic stripping away of moral consideration for nonhuman beings. These animals, often devoid of any recognized moral status, are treated with indifference to their sentience, painience (capacity to feel pain), and inherent value as subjects of a life.

The Moral Deprivation of "Point and Kill" Animals

The issue stems from the anthropocentric belief in human superiority—a notion that humans, by virtue of their species, are inherently superior to other animals. This belief, discussed in *Animal Liberation* by Peter Singer (1975), justifies the exploitation of animals for human benefit, reducing them to commodities rather than recognizing them as beings with intrinsic worth [19]. This worldview has permeated cultural practices, normalizing the treatment of animals as objects to be used and disposed of at will.

As a result, the life of a "Point and Kill" animal is one of constant apology—an apology for merely existing in a world dominated by humans who hold power over their fate. These animals are deprived of agency, including the basic will to live, as they are reduced to objects of human pleasure. The act of pointing at an animal to have it killed and served as food is a manifestation of this attitude of domination, reflecting a deep-seated historical bias against these animals, which are denied moral status and treated as beings of lesser value. As Thomas Regan argues in *The Case for Animal Rights* (1983), this denial of moral status is the first step in degrading and objectifying animals, a process that culminates in the negation of their essential qualities [20].

The Need for an Ethical Reassessment

The historical and cultural bias toward "Point and Kill" animals necessitates a profound ethical apology and reassessment. The human strategy of conquest and domination must give way to a new paradigm of service and accommodation—one that recognizes the moral status of all living beings. Immanuel Kant's philosophy, as presented in *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785/1997), provides a foundation for this shift. Kant argues that entities with moral status cannot be treated merely as means to an end but must be regarded as ends in themselves [21]. This implies that the needs, interests, and well-being of "Point and Kill" animals must be given moral weight, independent of any benefits humans might derive from them.

Moreover, the moral obligation to respect these animals arises not merely from a desire to avoid harm to humans but from the intrinsic moral

importance of the animals' needs themselves. Martha Nussbaum's *Frontiers of Justice* (2006) extends this argument, advocating for a capability approach that includes animals within the sphere of justice [22]. This perspective demands that the interests of these animals—particularly their interest in avoiding pain and suffering—be taken seriously. The casual and wanton killing of these animals is not only an act of moral disregard but also a failure to recognize their inherent worth, as Lori Gruen discusses in *Ethics and Animals: An Introduction* (2011) [23].

A Call for Compassion and Change

In line with Peter Singer's advocacy for animal rights, the killing of animals should never be done wantonly or without consideration of their suffering. If killing is deemed necessary, it must be done with the utmost respect for the animal's interest in minimizing pain. This perspective, as also supported by David DeGrazia in *Animal Rights: A Very Short Introduction* (2002), calls for a radical shift in how humans perceive and interact with nonhuman animals—moving away from a paradigm of domination towards one of compassion and respect [24].

The phrase "Point and Kill" should not be trivialized as a mere slogan that overlooks the lives of animals. Instead, it should prompt reflection on the ethical implications of our actions. It challenges us to reconsider the moral framework that has allowed such practices to flourish and to advocate for a world where all beings are treated with dignity and respect. This shift is crucial for acknowledging the inherent value of these animals and for rendering the long-overdue apology for the centuries of exploitation and suffering they have endured.

The Ethics of "Point and Kill"

Contemporary moral discourse on the treatment of nonhuman animals often reflects a narrow view of ethical conduct, one that is largely centered on relationships among human beings. This anthropocentric perspective assumes that moral considerations are primarily, if not exclusively, relevant to the interactions between humans, who must navigate the challenges of sharing limited resources in a hostile environment. Unfortunately, this view leaves little room for acknowledging the moral significance of nonhuman animals, which are often excluded from the sphere of moral concern. The critical questions we must ask are: Is it morally justifiable to point at an animal and have it instantly transformed into food? Are nonhuman animal beings worthy of moral consideration? And what should be the ethical relationship between human and nonhuman animals?

The Ethical Implications of "Point and Kill"

The practice of "Point and Kill," wherein an animal is selected and swiftly killed for consumption, raises profound ethical concerns. The phrase itself is laden with irony and brutality, encapsulating a transition from a seemingly benign act of pointing to the violent act of killing. In ordinary circumstances, pointing is an act of mere indication, devoid of any lethal consequence. However, when directed at a living being, especially a nonhuman animal, it becomes a prelude to an act of extermination. The ethical significance of this practice cannot be overstated, as it involves the deliberate termination of a sentient being's life, often with little regard for its suffering or intrinsic value.

The Speciesist vs. Anti-Speciesist Debate

At the heart of this issue lies the ongoing debate between speciesists and anti-speciesists. Speciesism, as a moral stance, holds that humans owe nothing to nonhuman animals, which are deemed to lack moral worth. According to speciesists, the treatment of animals, no matter how extreme, does not warrant moral scrutiny. This view is often grounded in arguments that emphasize differences between humans and nonhuman animals, such as rationality, linguistic capabilities, and physical characteristics [25]. However, anti-speciesists challenge these arguments, asserting that such differences are morally irrelevant and cannot justify the differential treatment of nonhuman animals.

Anti-speciesists, drawing on the work of philosophers like Peter Singer and Tom Regan, argue that species differences have no moral significance. What matters, they contend, is the capacity of nonhuman animals to experience pleasure and pain. As Jeremy Bentham famously posed, "The question is not, Can they reason? nor, Can they talk? but, Can they suffer?" [26]. This focus on sentience, rather than cognitive or physical abilities, forms the basis of the anti-speciesist argument that nonhuman animals are entitled to moral consideration.

The Moral Status of Nonhuman Animals

For anti-speciesists, the moral status of nonhuman animals is derived from their sentience—their ability to experience pleasure and pain. A being with moral status is entitled to certain rights, including the right to freedom, respect, and fair treatment. Such a being should not be used merely as a tool or instrument to promote the happiness or welfare of others, particularly when this involves the infliction of pain or suffering. This perspective challenges the ethical justification of practices like "Point and Kill," where animals are treated as mere commodities, their lives terminated for the fleeting pleasure of human consumption.

Philosophers such as Tom Regan, in *The Case for Animal Rights* (1983), argue that animals have inherent value as "subjects-of-a-life" [27]. This concept suggests that animals, like humans, have experiences, desires, and interests that matter to them independently of their utility to others. To treat them as mere means to an end—especially for something as trivial as culinary pleasure—is to violate their moral rights. Regan's deontological approach demands that we recognize and respect the intrinsic worth of nonhuman animals, rather than subordinating their interests to our own.

Reassessing the Human-Animal Relationship

The practice of "Point and Kill" also invites a broader reflection on the relationship between humans and nonhuman animals. Historically, this relationship has been characterized by domination and exploitation, rooted in the belief that humans are the pinnacle of moral and cognitive development. However, as philosophers like Martha Nussbaum argue in *Frontiers of Justice* (2006), a more just and compassionate society requires us to extend our ethical considerations to include nonhuman animals [28]. Nussbaum's capabilities approach advocates for a moral framework that recognizes the inherent dignity of all sentient beings and promotes their well-being.

From this perspective, the casual and wanton killing of animals in practices like "Point and Kill" represents a failure to recognize the moral obligations we have towards nonhuman animals. These obligations are not limited to avoiding unnecessary harm; they also include respecting the interests and needs of animals, recognizing their right to live free from suffering, and treating them as beings with intrinsic worth. The enjoyment derived from eating meat, as David DeGrazia points out in *Animal Rights: A Very Short Introduction* (2002), is morally insignificant when weighed against the suffering inflicted upon animals in the process of obtaining it [29].

CONCLUSION

The morality of "Point and Kill" practices forces us to reconsider deep-rooted ethical assumptions about our treatment of nonhuman animals. Historically, the moral circle has expanded to include marginalized groups, and today, it challenges us to recognize animals as sentient beings with intrinsic worth. The debate between speciesism and anti-speciesism highlights this ethical evolution, though often overlooking rich non-Western traditions where animals are seen as community members. By critically examining "Point and Kill," we are urged to adopt a more just and compassionate approach that values and protects the lives of all

sentient beings. This shift is not just about justice; it reflects our evolving humanity.

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