

ETHICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL VIEWS

Ethics are, in effect, a set of moral principles or codes. They are highly personal and change and evolve throughout our lives. Various factors affect an individual's code of ethics towards animals, including external factors, such as culture, religion, education and upbringing, and internal factors, such as an individual's level of compassion, ability to empathise and depth of thinking.

“THE GREATNESS OF A NATION AND ITS MORAL PROGRESS CAN BE JUDGED BY THE WAY ITS ANIMALS ARE TREATED.” ~ Mahatma Gandhi

The Evolution of Ethics

A historical study of certain societies illustrates that ethics evolve in line with cultural (and individual) development. Gradually, exploitation, injustice and oppression are recognised and rejected – as can be seen with examples such as the abolition of slavery, the banning of racism and the introduction of sexual equality.

It is interesting to note that many individuals who championed causes of human welfare also campaigned against cruelty to animals. These include: William Wilberforce, who campaigned to abolish slavery; great Victorian reformers, such as Lord Shaftesbury, Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill; black spokesperson Toussaint L'Overture of Haiti; and even Abraham Lincoln.

Our ethical foundations, especially in the West, have evolved as a human-biased morality, but the past 20 to 25 years have brought a significant change. Animal exploitation and suffering is increasingly recognised and dealt with as ethical attitudes develop, but this invariably takes longer, as human identification with animal suffering requires a greater degree of empathy and compassion.

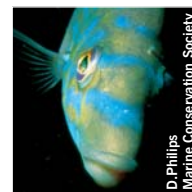
The moral and political importance of animal welfare is increasingly being recognised despite the fact that “exploitation of them has ingrained into our institutions” (Midgely). This is an indication of the moral strength of animal ethics. Governments throughout Europe and beyond feel growing pressure from their concerned electorates in respect of animal welfare issues. Consequently, parliaments debate and legislate on animal welfare, and respected forums such as the International Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) and the Council of Europe prepare conventions, recommendations and standards covering the protection of animals in different situations.

“UNTIL HE EXTENDS THE CIRCLE OF HIS COMPASSION TO ALL LIVING THINGS, MAN WILL NOT HIMSELF FIND PEACE.” ~ Albert Schweitzer

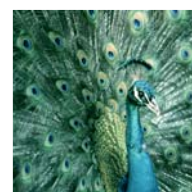
Range of Views on Animal Issues

There are many different viewpoints concerning man's relationship with animals. The variety of approaches to animal issues is entirely consistent with the fact that ethics vary from person to person:

Animal liberationists are fundamentally opposed to animal use or ownership by humans. Some will resort to illegal activities to release or rescue animals, believing that they have the moral right because existing laws are inadequate.



D. Phillips
Marine Conservation Society



Animal protectionist is a general term, which encompasses all categories of people seeking to improve the status and situation of animals. It covers a wider span of beliefs than animal welfare. The ethical standpoint of animal protectionists is based on the belief that each individual animal has an intrinsic value and should be respected and protected. They should be permitted to live their lives free from avoidable suffering at the hands of humans. In this regard, all animals kept by humans should be kept in circumstances appropriate to their species and where the needs of a species cannot be met, the species should not be kept.

Animal rights denotes the philosophical belief that animals should have rights, including the right to live their lives free from human intervention, and ultimate death at the hands of humans. Animal-rightists are philosophically opposed to the use of animals by humans, although some accept 'symbiotic' relationships, such as companion animal ownership.

Animal use signifies the legal use of animals, such as animal experimentation, farming etc.

Animal welfare denotes the desire to prevent unnecessary animal suffering; that is, whilst not categorically being opposed to the use of animals, wanting to ensure a good quality of life and humane death.

Conservationists focus on protecting species, populations and habitats, whereas animal welfarists focus on the individual animal. The conservation movement has gathered momentum over the last forty years.

Vegetarians do not eat any meat, poultry, game, fish, shellfish, or slaughter by-products such as gelatine or animal fats. The reasons for people becoming vegetarian are numerous, but many have an ethical objection to eating meat, or a concern about the suffering of animals, particularly in intensive farming systems.

Veganism is a way of life that seeks to exclude, as far as possible, anything derived from animals. Vegans do not consume any animal products, including eggs, dairy products or honey and also avoid the use of all products derived from animals, such as wool, leather and silk.

Summary of Philosophical Beliefs

Numerous philosophers have discussed animal ethics over the centuries. Examples of key philosophical views are highlighted below to illustrate how animal ethics continues to evolve.

Aristotle (Greek, 384–322BC) firmly held the view that animals were on the earth for the use of man: "Plants exist for the sake of animals and brute beasts for the sake of man – domestic animals for his use and food, wild ones for food and other accessories of life, such as clothing and various tools. Since nature makes nothing purposeless or in vain, it is undeniably true that she has made all the animals for the sake of man."

He was arguably initially responsible for the superior attitude that many Western countries have taken towards animals. He believed that animals were devoid of reason, and reason was what clearly distinguished humans from animals.

Plutarch (Greek, 46–c.120 AD) spoke out strongly against animal cruelty. He did not support the view that animals were put on the earth to be preyed upon by man and pointed to the intrinsic value of animals, their beauty, grace and the way in which they enrich nature. Unfortunately, Plutarch and others were unable to change the general ethos of the times.

Michel de Montaigne (French, 1533–1592) denounced any form of cruelty, whether towards humans or animals. He pointed out that animals communicate effectively amongst their own



species and that it is arrogance in the extreme for humans to label animals as stupid and unfeeling simply because humans cannot understand them.

Descartes (French, 1596–1650) believed that animals were like machines and not capable of experiencing pain. Therefore, he had few qualms about experimenting on them without administering any form of anaesthesia. The main reason for his belief was that animals were not capable of using speech or exhibiting emotion.

The idea that animals act in a machine-like fashion with no conscious thought processes of any kind is one of the oldest ideas in philosophy. But the more we find out about animals, the more this idea is disappearing. Evidence is growing that animals have far more cognitive abilities than has traditionally been believed that they are sentient creatures.

In the period known as the ‘Enlightenment’ (18th century), philosophers’ interests centred on the concept of ‘rationality’, stressing the superiority of the human mind, with its power to reason. Little regard was given to the laws of nature or to the importance of feelings; human rights and morals were defined from this basis.

Voltaire (French, 1694–1778) stressed that speech was not necessary in conveying feelings. In the same way that we could tell a person’s mood from his demeanour, we could tell when animals were experiencing feelings such as pleasure, anxiety and suffering. He noted that the physiology of animals closely resembled that of man, having pain receptors, nerves etc.

“PEOPLE MUST HAVE RENOUNCED, IT SEEMS TO ME, ALL NATURAL INTELLIGENCE TO DARE TO ADVANCE THAT ANIMALS ARE BUT ANIMATED MACHINES... IT APPEARS TO ME, BESIDES, THAT [SUCH PEOPLE] CAN NEVER HAVE OBSERVED WITH ATTENTION THE CHARACTER OF ANIMALS, NOT TO HAVE DISTINGUISHED AMONG THEM THE DIFFERENT VOICES OF NEED, OF SUFFERING, OF JOY, OF PAIN, OF LOVE, OF ANGER, AND OF ALL THEIR AFFECTIONS. IT WOULD BE VERY STRANGE THAT THEY SHOULD EXPRESS SO WELL WHAT THEY COULD NOT FEEL.” ~ Voltaire

Kant (German, 1724–1804) was a rationalist philosopher who did not consider that man had any direct duties towards animals although he denounced cruelty and believed that man should be kind to animals because this would develop humane feelings towards mankind.

Schopenhauer (German, 1788–1860) felt the similarities between humans and animals were incomparably greater than any differences. He stated that “compassion for animals is intimately connected with goodness of character and it may be confidently asserted that he who is cruel to animals cannot be a good man”.

Jeremy Bentham (English 1748–1832) was the founder of Utilitarianism, a philosophy that believed in trying to find the action necessary to produce the best ratio of pleasure (happiness) to pain (suffering) amongst all those we affect. His most famous quote attacked the narrowness of the ‘rationality’ argument directly: “The question about animals is not can they reason, nor can they talk, but can they suffer?”

He likened the plight of animals to that of slaves, in that slaves represented a sector of the human species that were treated as ‘lesser beings’. He held that the day would come when the rest of animal creation would similarly acquire the rights withheld from them by the hand of tyranny, in the same way that the slaves had.



John Stuart Mill (British, 1806–1873) supported Jeremy Bentham's viewpoint. He felt that it was entirely natural, and moral, for man to care about the pain and pleasure of another species.

Charles Darwin (English 1809–1882) felt it had been well established that 'lower animals' were excited by the same emotions as humans. He stated: "The lower animals, like man, manifestly feel pleasure and pain, happiness and misery. Happiness is never better exhibited than by young animals, such as puppies, kittens, lambs etc., when playing together, like our own children." His observations showed that terror acts on animals in the same way as on people; causing muscle trembling, heart palpitations, sphincter relaxation and making hair stand on end. He also stressed the positive feelings and emotions of animals, such as the enduring love of a dog for its master and the maternal affection of animals such as primates and the display of altruistic emotions, such as sympathy.

"THERE IS NO FUNDAMENTAL DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MAN AND THE HIGHER MAMMALS IN THEIR MENTAL FACULTIES... THE DIFFERENCE IN MIND BETWEEN MAN AND THE HIGHER ANIMALS, GREAT AS IT IS, CERTAINLY IS ONE OF DEGREE AND NOT OF KIND. THE LOVE FOR ALL LIVING CREATURES IS THE MOST NOBLE ATTRIBUTE OF MAN."

~ Charles Darwin



Albert Schweitzer's (German 1875–1965) most lasting legacy is the articulation of his basic philosophy 'reverence for life', culminating in his two-volume *Philosophy of Civilisation*. Schweitzer saw reverence for life as a practical lifetime ethic, rather than a philosophical message. He described it as the ethic of love widened into universality. Life was regarded as sacred and adherents would go out of their way to avoid injuring anything living.

"VERY LITTLE OF THE GREAT CRUELTY SHOWN BY MEN CAN REALLY BE ATTRIBUTED TO CRUEL INSTINCT. MOST OF IT COMES FROM THOUGHTLESSNESS OR INHERITED HABIT. THE ROOTS OF CRUELTY, THEREFORE, ARE NOT SO MUCH STRONG AS WIDESPREAD. BUT THE TIME MUST COME WHEN INHUMANITY PROTECTED BY CUSTOM AND THOUGHTLESSNESS WILL SUCCUMB BEFORE HUMANITY CHAMPIONED BY THOUGHT. LET US WORK THAT THIS TIME MAY COME."

~ Albert Schweitzer

Contemporary Views

Peter Singer did much to increase awareness of the inherent immorality of animal exploitation, which he felt was the last remaining form of discrimination. His seminal book *Animal Liberation*, published in 1974, explores the concept of ethics in the treatment of animals and asks such thought-provoking questions as "Why do we lock up chimpanzees in appalling primate research centres and use them in experiments that range from the uncomfortable to the agonising and lethal, yet would never think of doing the same to a retarded human being at a much lower mental level?"

Tom Regan and other philosophers, such as **Stephen Clark** and **Bernard Rollin**, have put forward the argument about animals having rights. This is a particularly attractive proposition in the USA, where human rights evoke such a strong response. However, the argument has its drawbacks, as rights are seen to come with responsibilities, which animals arguably lack, particularly in a legal sense.

Gary Francione, an American professor of law, has forced the animal rights movement to confront an enormous dichotomy that exists between the welfarist stance and the animal rightist philosophy. His viewpoint is that if animals have any moral significance at all (i.e. they are not things to whom we have no direct moral obligations), then we must extend to them one right – the right not to be

property. His is an abolitionist position. Francione differs from all other theorists who have gone before him, including Peter Singer, in that his theory does not rest upon cognitive capacity (beyond the ability to feel pain) for possession of this one basic right.

NON-VIOLENCE LEADS TO THE HIGHEST ETHICS, WHICH IS THE GOAL OF ALL EVOLUTION. UNTIL WE STOP HARMING ALL OTHER LIVING BEINGS, WE ARE STILL SAVAGES." ~ Thomas A. Edison





Environmental Ethics

www.environmentalethics.ca

Ethical Matrix CIWF

www.animalsentience.com/features/ethical_matrix.htm

Ethics Updates

ethics.acusd.edu

Peter Singer website

www.petersingerlinks.com

Philosophical Discussion of the Moral Status of Nonhuman Animals

animaethics.blogspot.com

Selected Internet Resources on the Moral Status of Animals

ethics.sandiego.edu/Applied/Animals

Sentience website CIWF

www.animalsentience.com

Society and Animals Forum (formerly Psychologists for the Ethical Treatment of Animals)

www.psyeta.org

Journals

Society and Animals Forum

Journal of Applied Animal Welfare Science: joint project with the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals

www.psyeta.org/jaaws/index.html

Society & Animals: Journal of Human-Animal Studies

www.psyeta.org/sa/index.html

Books

All That Dwell Therein

Tom Regan

Publisher: University of California Press

ISBN: 0520045718

The Animal Contract

Desmond Morris

Publisher: ISIS Large Print

ISBN: 1856950964

Contains a 'Bill of Rights' for animals, which Desmond Morris believes is practical and feasible.

Animal Liberation

Peter Singer

Publisher: Pimlico

ISBN: 0712674446

This book did much to bring attention to ethical issues concerning animals – a classic philosophical text on the modern animal liberation movement.

Animals' Rights: A Symposium

David Paterson (Editor) & Richard Ryder (Editor)
Publisher: Open Gate Press
ISBN: 0900000902

Animal Rights: A Very Short Introduction

David DeGrazia
Publisher: Oxford Paperbacks
ISBN: 0192853600

Animal Rights and Human Obligations

Tom Regan & Peter Singer
Publisher: Prentice Hall
ISBN: 0130375314

Animal Rights: The Changing Debate

R. Garner
Publisher: New York University Press
ISBN: 0814730981

Animal Welfare

Sir Colin Spedding
Publisher: Earthscan
ISBN: 1853836729

Animals and Why They Matter

Mary Midgley
Publisher: University of Georgia Press
ISBN: 0820320412

Attitudes to Animals: Views in Animal Welfare

F. L. Dolins
Publisher: Cambridge University Press
ISBN: 052147342X

Bioethics: An Anthology

H. Kuhse & P. Singer
Publisher: Blackwell Publishers
ISBN: 0631203117

The Case for Animal Rights

Tom Regan
Publisher: University of California Press
ISBN: 0520054601
Rigorous exploration of the case for animal rights

Defending Animal Rights

Tom Regan
Publisher: University of Illinois Press
ISBN: 025202611X



Dominion

Matthew Scully
 Publisher: Saint Martin's Press
 ISBN: 0312261470

Ethics, Humans and Other Animals: An Introduction with Readings

Rosalind Hursthouse
 Publisher: Routledge
 ISBN: 0415212421

The Extended Circle

J.Wynne-Tyson
 Publisher: Open Gate Press
 ISBN: 0900001224

A to Z of writings to promote compassionate and responsible attitudes – an anthology of humane thought

The Human Use of Animals: Case Studies in Ethical Choice

F. B. Orlans et al
 Publisher: Oxford University Press
 ISBN: 0195119088

In Defense of Animals: The Second Wave

Peter Singer
 Publisher: Blackwell Publishing
 ISBN: 1405119411

On the Fifth Day: Animal Rights and Human Ethics

Richard Knowles Morris (Editor) & Michael W. Fox (Editor)
 Publisher: Acropolis Bks, US
 ISBN: 0874911966

The Unheeded Cry: Animal Consciousness, Animal Pain and Science

Bernard Rollin
 Publisher: Iowa State University Press
 ISBN: 0813825768

