



Lesson 6: Animal Rights (Part 1)

Animal Rights: What is our Moral Obligation?

It doesn't take long for a new pet to worm their way into a family's home and hearts. More often than not, pets become part of the family, and the loss of a pet can be felt as acutely as the loss of a person. Humans have long had complicated relationships with other species. Not only can animals be beloved family members, they can also be part of a meal, or a source of entertainment and sport. In all of the above contexts, humans control the fate of the animal. Is this fair? Do humans have the right to use animals as resources, in any way they choose? Or, should animals be considered sentient beings, in and of themselves, deserving of rights and freedoms? These are the questions at the heart of the animal rights debate.

What are animal rights?

Animal rights is the belief that animals have worth and value as living beings, regardless of their usefulness to humans. Because of this, they have a right to live their lives free of pain, suffering, confinement, and abuse caused by human hands. They are deserving of careful thought and consideration in regards to their treatment and use. The animal rights movement is founded on two guiding principles: the rejection of speciesism, and the belief that animals are sentient beings. Speciesism is the belief that humans are superior to animals and should therefore be granted more rights and freedoms, allowed to treat animals as they please. It is a form of prejudice towards those not of the human species and has been used to justify practices such as factory farming, animal testing, and killing animals for their skin or fur. Animal rights activists reject the notion that any species is superior to another. They also firmly believe that animals are sentient beings, with the ability to suffer and feel pain. The act of inflicting suffering and pain on any other being is unacceptable and morally wrong.

How did animal activism begin?

Concern for the welfare of animals is not a modern phenomenon. The early religious texts of major world religions all discuss the ethical treatment of animals. Ancient Hindu and Buddhist scriptures promote vegetarianism, founded on the principle of ahimsa, a belief that condemns the killing of any living being. These faiths hold that human life is not of greater value than any other life form. Likewise, animal rights were recognized early in Islamic law. Islamic doctrine states that animals exist in community, have souls, and are conscious of God. They must be treated with kindness and compassion. Jewish law states that animals are part of God's creation and human beings must not cause pain to any living creature. Christian scriptures often speak of the need to express kindness to all the world's creatures. In all but the first example, meat-eating is permissible for human nourishment, but causing undue suffering to animals is morally wrong. Islamic law provides guidelines for the slaughter of certain animals, in order to ensure dignity in death. Though the concept of animal welfare has roots in religion, the issue has evolved over thousands of years and modern day animal rights initiatives are influenced by philosophical thought.

When did philosophers get involved?

René Descartes, John Locke, and Immanuel Kant were among early philosophers who commented on the morality of the mistreatment of animals. Ideas put forth in the 17th century include the thought that animals do not have consciousness (Descartes), they are able to feel (Locke) and that cruelty to animals equates to cruelty to one's self, as humans all have animal nature (Kant). 18th century philosophers focused on sentience when discussing animal rights. The fact that animals can indeed suffer was the benchmark used when discussing their treatment. Animal rights discussions exploded in the 19th century, especially in England, where some of the first legislation was introduced. In the modern era, there are two philosophers most noted for their support of animal rights. In 1975, Australian philosopher Peter Singer published the book *Animal Liberation*, a publication that was instrumental in kick-starting modern-day animal activism. Singer, a utilitarian philosopher, believes that the goal of life is to maximize happiness and minimize suffering. He does not distinguish between considerations given to humans or

non-humans: his belief is that animals are sentient beings and as such, deserve the same care for their well-being as humans. Therefore, any act that produces suffering and pain, regardless of the subject of that action, is immoral. A colleague of Singer's, Tom Regan, an American philosopher, promotes the idea that every living thing has inherent worth and value, and therefore is deserving of moral rights. Regan believes that animals should be treated as humans and in no way should be used to benefit human lives. Regan's position is radical, calling for the end to all commercial farming, hunting, and experimentation on animals.

What are the laws?

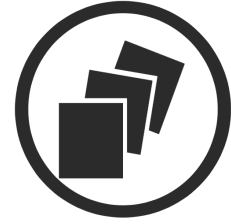
Currently, around the globe, the laws and rights of animals vary greatly between countries and regions. Some jurisdictions recognize animal sentience and the laws reflect that belief. In other countries, there is a complete lack of regard for animal welfare. Protection for animals took legal form first in England. The first bill to address the protection of animals was introduced in British parliament in 1809. This set the stage for animal welfare laws to emerge around the world. In Canada, animal anti-cruelty laws were written into the criminal code in 1892. Canadian law states that humans must provide proper care for animals and ensure no pain and suffering. The Animal Welfare Act, which originated in the United States in 1966, legislates the treatment of animals in research facilities and exhibitions. The U.S. also enacted the Humane Slaughter Act, providing guidance for the humane slaughter of agricultural animals. In addition to legal protection of animals, thousands of organizations and charities have emerged globally, concerning themselves with animal wellness. One of these, the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) was established in Britain in 1824, and now operates world-wide.

What are the moral issues?

It is hard to argue that animals should not be treated with compassion. But the issue of animal rights is not straightforward and the discussion raises many questions. For example, are our moral obligations the same towards all animals? Is it not possible that the use of one animal for a given purpose may be acceptable whereas the use of another animal for that same purpose might be considered immoral? For example, it may be morally permissible to consume the meat of a cow, but not that of a horse. It may be moral to use rats as subjects for animal testing but not puppies. In the case of animal testing, is it not permissible to perform tests on animals if those tests could help save human lives? Should we only concern ourselves with certain types of animals, ones that we know have feelings and are conscious? What about insects, or single-celled organisms? How do we decide what to protect?

Conclusion

Human rights and animals rights are clearly different. It is impossible for humans to ensure that all animals have access to food and housing. A bear must find its own den and a bird its own worms. However, humans can help ensure that animals are free from cruelty at the hands of other humans and that they are treated with dignity, allowing them to live full, free lives. According to animal rights, this is our moral obligation.



Animal Rights Vocabulary

Play this card game in groups of three or four. Shuffle the cards and place the deck in the middle. Player 1 takes a card and reads the definition aloud. Players 2 and 3 try to guess the vocabulary word or phrase. Player 1 gives the card to the player who correctly guesses the word or phrase first.

If both players answer correctly, Player 1 returns the card to the bottom of the deck. If neither player answers correctly, Player 1 reads the answer and returns the card to the bottom of the deck. The player to the left takes the next turn. The player with the most cards at the end is the winner.

This serious game provides useful practice learning the precise definitions and vocabulary for this chapter. Since only correct answers can win the card, this game provides opportunities for implicit peer-feedback in a safe and structured way. This game also provides opportunities for careful listening, friendly competition, and reciprocal teaching.



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<p>Vigorous campaigning to bring about political or social change.</p> <p>activism</p>	<p>Moral or legal entitlements believed to belong to animals to live free from use in medical research, hunting, and other services to humans.</p> <p>animal rights</p>
<p>Dearly loved.</p> <p>beloved</p>	<p>A standard or point of reference against which things may be compared or assessed.</p> <p>benchmark</p>
<p>Sympathetic pity and concern for the sufferings or misfortunes of others.</p> <p>compassion</p>	<p>Callous indifference to or pleasure in causing pain and suffering.</p> <p>cruelty</p>
<p>A wild animal's lair or hideout.</p> <p>den</p>	<p>The state or quality of being worthy of honor or respect.</p> <p>dignity</p>
<p>Relating to moral principles of right and wrong.</p> <p>ethical</p>	<p>The process of performing a scientific procedure in a laboratory to answer a question.</p> <p>experimentation</p>
<p>A system of rearing livestock using intensive methods, by which poultry, pigs, or cattle are confined indoors under strictly controlled conditions.</p> <p>factory farming</p>	<p>The development of events beyond a person's control.</p> <p>fate</p>

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<p>Based on a particular principle.</p> <p>founded</p>	<p>The territory within which authority may be exercised.</p> <p>jurisdictions</p>
<p>Provide the initial impetus to something.</p> <p>kick-start</p>	<p>The bad, cruel, or unfair manner in which someone behaves toward another.</p> <p>mistreatment</p>
<p>Duty or commitment.</p> <p>obligation</p>	<p>An individual animal, plant, or single-celled life form.</p> <p>organism</p>
<p>Permitted; allowed.</p> <p>permissible</p>	<p>A preconceived opinion that is not based on reason or actual experience.</p> <p>prejudice</p>
<p>Based on thorough or complete social change</p> <p>radical</p>	<p>Without paying attention to prevailing circumstances.</p> <p>regardless</p>
<p>The sacred writings of a religion.</p> <p>scriptures</p>	<p>Able to perceive or feel things.</p> <p>sentient</p>

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<p>The killing of animals for food.</p> <p>slaughter</p>	<p>The belief that humans are superior to animals and should therefore be granted more rights and freedoms.</p> <p>speciesism</p>
<p>Uncomplicated and easy to do or understand.</p> <p>straightforward</p>	<p>The state of undergoing pain, distress, or hardship.</p> <p>suffering</p>
<p>Unwarranted or inappropriate because excessive or disproportionate.</p> <p>undue</p>	<p>An adherent of the doctrine that actions are right if they are useful or for the benefit of a majority.</p> <p>utilitarian</p>
<p>The practice of not eating meat or fish, especially for moral, religious, or health reasons.</p> <p>vegetarianism</p>	<p>The health, happiness, and fortunes of a sentient being.</p> <p>welfare</p>
<p>The state of being in good health.</p> <p>wellness</p>	<p>In contrast or comparison with the fact that.</p> <p>whereas</p>
<p>Any of a number of creeping or burrowing invertebrate animals with long, slender soft bodies and no limbs.</p> <p>worm</p>	<p>To get oneself into a desired situation in a gradual and usually clever way.</p> <p>worm their way into</p>