

# Man and Animal Face To Face: A Philosophical Study On Animal Rights

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## Abstract

Our moral obligations towards non-human entities occupy an important place in the recent debate of moral philosophy. The concept of animal rights comes under the branch of practical ethics. The content of animal rights involves the discussion of the rights that animals possess. It is said that every living organism has the right to live. Animals too, belong to the group of living organisms. They eat, sleep, move etc. they survive; therefore, they too have the right to live and have their freedom. They help in our day-to-day activities and co-relate with us. But though we get services from animals, yet it is seen that they are regarded as lower and inferior than us. Though man is the highest creature of the world, there are cases where the cause of animals has been given an upper hand than man. Though animals have

moral rights, will it be always correct to give them an upper hand in all issues. What should be the moral basis on which we can decide whom to prefer when man and animal comes face to face. Therefore, in this paper I would like to make a philosophical analysis of the moral issues connected to man animal conflict and the rights of animals.

**Keywords**

Man, Animal, Rights, Morality, Protection etc.

**Introduction**

The concept of animal rights is one of the branches of practical ethics whose aim is to discuss the rights that animals possess. It is said that every living organism has the right to live. Animals too belong to the group of living organisms--- they move, eat, sleep, etc. They survive; therefore, they also have the right to live and freedom. They help in our day-to-day activities and always correlate with us. Yet, sometimes their minimum individual right is ignored and neglected by the general modes. Animals are regarded to be a lower and inferior class to us.

That animals also have certain rights and they are not simply out there in the world in order to be dominated by us is a view which gained philosophical prominence in the 1970's. Philosophers like Peter Singer, Tom Regan strongly advocated the case for animal rights. The revolutionary thoughts of animals having rights lead to a new era in the animal world, which later gave birth to environmental ethics and non-spiciest ethics.

Regarding the philosophical view on animal rights there are many differences between the early philosophical thought and the contemporary philosophical thought. Both the views stand as the two poles apart of the globe. Here are the analysis of some early classical views regarding animal rights.

### **Methodology**

To Carry out the proposed research work in a systematic manner the analytic, conceptual and qualitative method, is taken into account. Again, in this study in some places the descriptive and evaluative methods are used. The whole work too involves library work and different primary and secondary sources including books, periodical journals, articles, internet etc.

### **Objective of the Study**

Main objectives of this paper are as follows

1. Present and analysis of the idea of animal rights.
2. Focus on the classical and contemporary views on animal rights by different philosophers.
3. Discussion of a moral debate on animal rights with the present scenario.
4. Discussion of the acceptability of animal rights.

### **Early Classical Views**

The concept of Animal Rights was unknown to the ancient thought during antiquity. In the book of Genesis (which is the first word of the Old Testament), it is stated that God has created human beings in his own image and “said them to be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth and conquer it. Again, it is

said to be the master of the fish of the sea, the birds of heaven and all living animals on the earth”(Genesis 1.28). The Greek book of Genesis (the Septuaginta (LXX)) and the Hebrew book of Genesis holds that animals and humans are said to be, not have, a living soul. This living human and non-human animal are called Nephesh which are associated with the breath of life that YHWH (name of the God of the Israelites, it revealed to Moses in the book of Exodus) has given to each individual.

The Instrumentalist view in which animals are regarded as means to some end namely, human happiness is found in the philosophy of Aristotle too. Aristotle stated that animals are there in order to provide food for human beings and other needs of life. Though Aristotle believed that both human and non-human animals possess the sensible soul but our rational qualities differentiate us from animals. Human beings are capable of self-analysis, self-realization, abstract reasoning, cultural establishment and morality. These higher-level qualities and skills differentiate us from non-human animals.

St. Thomas Aquinas, a medieval philosopher, stated that God Himself provided animals for the help and uses of human beings, so, it is not wrong for man to make use of animals including killing them. Again, he said that charity is not to be extended to animals. It is to be conjoined to rational beings and animals are irrational beings; not our fellow beings. But Thomas Aquinas has given an influential argument

in the 13<sup>th</sup> century that humans should be kind to animals and make sure that cruel habits do not carry over into our treatment of other human beings.

Rene Descartes also does not recognize the concept of animal rights and did not take any account of animal rights. According to Descartes, animals are called “Automata”. As we know mobile phones are made by human beings through mechanical principles, similarly, animals are also created by mechanical principles. Animals do not possess a soul like humans. Therefore, it is said that they are just like the non-living, non-feeling, machines and have no rights.

In the philosophy of Kant’s categorical imperative, there is a maxim like “so act as to treat humanity whether in thine own person or in that of any other, always as an end, and never as a means only(Manual of Ethics, J.N Sinha 140). It identifies that we should respect people not by using them but their autonomous character which helps to pursue their own goals. Autonomy is absolutely valuable and in order to have it one must have to be self-conscious, free will and the ability to be guided by reason. But non-human animals are not autonomous, according to Kant. Therefore, categorical imperative does not apply to them. Thus, it is said that men have no direct duties to animal, that is we don’t have any duty to respect the ends of animals. Therefore, they are deprived of any kinds of rights and our duty to animal is indirect. But he said that man should not be cruel to animal because that might lead us cruel too. Hence kindness to animals mean to

teach yourself that how to act kindly and harmoniously with other fellow beings. Otherwise Kant did not interpret any doctrine regarding animal rights. The doctrine of animal right is primary concept in his philosophy. We have an indirect duty towards animals in the sense that this indirect duty will help us to serve our primary duty towards human beings. This Kantian view is sometimes known as “The Indirect Duty View”.

### **Contemporary Views**

The doctrine of animal rights in contemporary philosophy is based on the idea that non-human animals should not be used by people for any reason. Animal rights should protect the interest of animals the way human rights protect people. Philosophical discussion about animal rights had to wait about two centuries after the publication of Bentham’s book. The concept of animal rights was taken up in earnest by philosophers of the contemporary time, like Peter Singer, Richard Ryder, Tom Regan, Arne Naess etc.

Richard Ryder was a British psychologist, who first coined the term “Speciesism”. Speciesism is the view according to which the species “homo sapiens” (human being) has a privileged status and the members of this species enjoy rights by virtue of their belonging to this species. Other animals do not belong to this species so, they don’t have the rights. But “speciesism” was rejected by Ryder as “morally wrong” as it cannot be the measuring factor or unit of any beings’ capabilities or in capabilities. He also rejects the act of

conducting experiments on animals, who though cannot speak like humans, can feel and suffer the pain inflicted on them, equally like a man.

Peter Singer in his philosophy has compared 'speciesism' to 'Racism' and 'sexism'. Racism believes that discrimination or classification are made by an individual on basis of skin colour, race, distinct characteristics, abilities, qualities, etc., and 'Sexism' is the measure of classification between man and women on the basis of gender. It is called gender inequality. But just as Racism and sexism is morally indefensible, so as speciesism is. This ultimately resulted in the idea of liberation of animals. In the book *Animal Liberation and A New Ethics for Our Treatment of Animal* (1975) Peter Singer discussed the concept of animal rights. In this book, he strongly rejected the view of Aristotle regarding the relationship between man and animal, the idea that animals are out there to be dominated by man is vehemently criticized by Singer. In the book *Animal Liberation*, Peter Singer stated that the rights and interest of animals should be given equal consideration, it means non-human animals also deserve the equal care for their well-being similar to humans.

Again, the philosopher Tom Regan, a leading advocate of animal rights, has introduced the idea of 'Subject of a Life' in his book *'The Case For Animal Rights'* (1983). According to Regan human beings are subject to life, similarly animals are also subject to life. Humans can think, decide, take action, move, sleep, etc., similarly animals can too. So, if

humans are the owner of their life, similarly, in this sense animals will also be the owner of their life, subject of their life. Just as Kant said that human beings' rights follow from their right of autonomy of will, similarly, according to Regan, some rights follow from the 'subject of life' called the animal rights. Here, Regan took a Kantian doctrine and stated that like man, animals should be treated as ends-in-themselves, not as a means.

Tom Regan is also against the captivity of animals in zoos. He stands against captivity because it interferes with the capacity and ability of an animal to live well. This criticism given by him is based on the principle of 'Respect for Autonomy'. Captivating an animal might lead to genetic divergence of an animal from its ancestral breed and we, in any form, have no right to play with any genetic line of any organism.

Arne Naess, a Norwegian philosopher introduced the concept of "Deep Ecology" in 1973. He stated that the whole ecological system involves the rights of all beings and are not corollaries of human rights. They are primary and human rights are secondary in this theory of Naess. Again, he holds that though nature serves humans, it has value for itself, not for us. Non-human animals have their own values and we depend upon them for our livelihood and sustainability.

The above discussion shows the divergences of the thinking track between the classical and contemporary thinkers regarding "Animal Rights". Most of the classical



thinkers viewed the issue of animal rights, on the other hand, the views of the contemporary thinkers in favor of animal rights.

**Moral Debates on Animal Rights: Whether it is acceptable or not**

It is very difficult to give answer that whether killing or using animal for the help and benefit of man is morally right or wrong. It is very interesting controversial debate in recent trends. Such debates give rise to two schools. Some are against and some are in favor of animal rights. The philosophers who stand against animal rights, stated that not only the animal but all non-human living beings are created by God only to serve the human being. Because human being is the highest creature of the universe. Therefore, human beings are supposed to be the masters of animal. Man has the absolute right to use the animal as their requirement for the fulfillment of their ends. Again, the supporters of animal rights stated that man has no right to use animal unnecessarily, because animals are also the living creatures like man and both man and animal are the beautiful creation of God. Therefore, like man, animal has also the right to live equally in this world and deserve equal consideration in every aspect as Tom Regan and Peter Singer said. Arne Naess also said in his philosophy that animal rights are primary and human rights are secondary because human beings are dependent on animal.

Now the question arises, whose side should we take?

My view is that though both the groups stand dogmatically in their own perspective, the idea of both ancient and contemporary groups are not absolutely right but relatively correct. The view that animals deserve equal consideration as manas stated by Peter Singer and Tom Regan is not absolutely acceptable. Because animals may deserve more consideration, but it is relative to their 'life value'. It depends on how an animal acts, behalf helpful in our daily life. Therefore, it will be wrong to believe that man should share the same rights to animals, but they deserve some equal consideration in certain circumstances, like right to live, right to eat, right to move, sleep etc. We cannot totally agree with the view as Arne Naess stated animals are considered as the primary subject. Because we all know that men are the highest creature because of their rational character and the autonomy of will. Animals cannot think rationally, therefore we cannot give primary position to the animal. Yes, animals deserve some rights and some general consideration but it does not mean that we should give equal consideration to animals like humans or we should treat animals superior to man. Man has the highest value as accepted universally. Twentieth century Existential Philosophy was also introduced only for the questioning on the existence of man, not animal. Here they considered man as the highest being.

But sometimes we forget the value of human beings and give very much priority to the animal for advertisement to fulfill some agenda. It is our right and responsibility to protect

animals, but it is important that man and its value should be the first priority. We have seen in many states of India that though the government is unable to provide equal rights, food, education, and health to the people, their main agenda is to make some act or law to protect animals. For example, the Uttar Pradesh Government started a 24-hour Abhinav Ambulance service for the treatment of cows in the state from December 2021 (*India Today*, Nov. 15, 2021). But Lucknow police on December 5, 2021, Saturday evening broke up peaceful protesters using lathi charge for holding a candlelight march over the alleged irregularities in the 2019 Uttar Pradesh teachers' entrance test by recruiting 69,000 assistant teachers. This is the present image of this state where animals should be protected but men should protest to get their own rights. There are so many examples like this. Through this way, it is not possible not to protect the animal and also the law will not come into force and practice if men are unable to get their rights and opportunities that they deserve by their nation.

No doubt, it is our very important duty and responsibility to protect animals, because animals are related to us and they help in our day-to-day life activities, basically in farming. We cannot ignore and neglect them as lower and inferior class to us. They play a significant role in our life. But is there any necessary to make any act or law to protect the animal. Yes, there is a necessity to make law. But main thing is that before making the law for protecting animal, it is very

necessary to solve all the problems that man face. At this juncture it will be easy to practice all the act or law which are made for cattle protection. Practicing any act or law is a state of mind of the people. State of mind of a man will be changed if a man gets equal opportunity what they deserve then the protection of animal will be easy. Man is a rational being. Man is considered to be rational, when he submit himself to his own rational nature. We are bound to obey the rational act. Therefore, as a rational being we have to think rationally that animals are also the part of our life, not the external object. The protection of animal is our duty and responsibility. At this juncture, the conflict between man and animal face to face will be dismissed. In this sense, it is said that there may be no need to make any law like cattle protection act for the protection of animals if man has no problem to get equal opportunity.

### **Conclusion**

Western tradition like Greek, took the help of anthropomorphic means to run their central idea of worship or religion, that is projecting humans as the pivotal idea upon the external world, even their God and Goddesses. In the classical times also, humans are given the primary and central place in the worldly activities, spheres and relations. But it is only after Bentham, that a kind of animal revolution took place and concerns of thinking moved to animal realms. This affected the contemporary era, which is seen to be mostly concerned with animals and their rights and regularities with the same as

man. But the hotly debated questions on animal rights are like the questions of using animals in experiments, research; using them as means for human benefits; eating them and killing them cruelly and painfully are some of the many questions that are acceptable or not. My view is that for the experiments or research the uses of animals as a means is acceptable, because experiment is very important to get any new invention. Without experiment the progression of science is not possible. Sometimes killing an animal in a certain circumstance is also acceptable for me. Because it is the source of protein, which is very necessary for our health. But the unnecessary killing and cruelty to animal will not be acceptable, because that might make us cruel too. Again, Animal should be controlled by man, otherwise they may harm to the man. Finally, I want to say that man has the right to use animal in their day-to-day life, but as a rational being, it is also the duty and responsibility for a man to provide timely all the necessary requirement for the protection and the well-being of animals. Hence, animals are the important part of our life. But first priority should be given to human being then non-human animal. Men are primary beings; animals are secondary. Therefore, first human rights come then animal rights. Man is the highest creature of this universe and animals are the lower and inferior class to us. But we cannot ignore them as lower and inferior class, because they play an important role in our day-to-day activities and they possess some equal rights with man also.

In this sense our mentality will be changed and the face to conflict between man and animal will be dismissed.

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