

## Animal Rights/Welfare

A movement and a belief system that propose a different standard for moral treatment of animals than that widely held in European-based cultural traditions. This entry focuses on the philosophy of animal rights activists and organizations. Animal activists, particularly those who believe in animal rights, have an organized philosophy that differs distinctly from other widely held worldviews, are concerned with a variety of issues affecting animals, and can tap a large body of resources (money, volunteers, organizations). Activists generally focus on changing the way humans use animals for food, research, hunting, and entertainment; activists have had differing degrees of success with each issue.

### Organized Philosophy

The moderate wing of the animal movement primarily concerns itself with protecting animals from suffering and cruelty, an aim little different than the original goals of the American Humane Association (AHA), founded in 1877, and the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA), founded in 1866. Then and now, moderates largely accept that humans should manage and use animals. Animal welfare groups tend to be relatively pragmatic, accept compromise, and avoid the more extreme tactics of the animal rights groups, tactics that include confrontation, civil disobedience, and, at the most extreme end, break-ins and vandalism. Animal pragmatists can point to more legal and economic victories, but pressure from animal rights groups has fundamentally changed the debate on how humans should treat animals.

Animal rights philosophies are closer to a medieval view of animals in that both treat animals and humans as similar in morally relevant ways. In medieval Europe, animals were executed for murder, bestiality, and theft under the same legal system that applied to humans. Today's animal rights

activists argue that animals have the same right to be treated with respect that humans do; the more comprehensively committed animal rights activists will not eat meat, wear leather, drink milk, hunt, fish, go to zoos, have pets, or support any research that involves animals, from developing and testing drugs to basic research.

Singer (1990) and Regan (1983), two philosophers, set the stage for much of the modern discussion of the moral status of animals. Singer, a utilitarian philosopher, argued that animals that can feel pain have interest in increasing pleasure and decreasing pain. Moral actors—humans—should include animals' interests in decisions that would affect animals' overall pleasure. Complex animals (for example, pigs, cows, and dogs) are close enough to humans for us to assume that these animals have a simple form of self-awareness as beings with futures and pasts. Humans should consider animals' preferences before taking actions that affect them. Killing any mammal, including cows, pigs, dogs and so on, is wrong when the killing would, on balance, deny the animal more future pleasure than pain. Singer shaded his argument for chickens; their nervous system may not be developed enough to be self-aware. Regan, a rights philosopher, argued that individuals who are self-conscious—mentally complex enough to start actions in the present with the intention of satisfying their desires in the future—have a basic right to respectful treatment, which includes a *prima facie* right not to be harmed. He assumed all mammals are conscious of self. Chickens and turkeys may not be complex enough to have inalienable rights.

### Organizations

The animal rights movement includes 7,000 different groups that collectively have 10 million members and an estimated budget of \$50 million. The most widely known groups generally work on a variety of