

Philosophy report for Forum – May 2022 meeting

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Should animals have rights? What do you think?

This month the philosophy group looked at the approach we have to animals in terms of their rights. To clarify our thinking we studied three philosophers:

Tom Regan (1938 – 2017) was an American philosopher who specialised in Animal Rights theory. In *The Case for Animal Rights* (1983), Regan argues that non-human animals have moral rights and therefore we must work towards:



- the total abolition of the use of animals in science;
- the total dissolution of commercial animal agriculture;
- the total elimination of commercial and sport hunting and trapping.

The fundamental wrong is the system that allows us to view animals as *our resources*, here for *us* — to be eaten, or surgically manipulated, or exploited for sport or money. Regan's view rests on his determination that every sentient being has moral status and worth.



Peter Singer (born 1946)

Animal Liberation (1975) launched the animal rights movement.

It was a call to end the pain and suffering of animals. In fact, Peter Singer likened the tyranny on animals with that of white humans over black humans. Peter Singer position today is classified as utilitarian following on Jeremy Bentham's agreement for sentience as the bar we should use to measure morality as opposed to reason.

The argument runs as follows. Since all sentient beings have the ability to suffer, it follows that they have interests. And since they have interests, when these are frustrated, it leads to suffering. Being a utilitarian, Singer's position is

one that seeks to maximize satisfaction of interests whether they are of humans or animals.

Carl Cohen (born 1931) University of Michigan:

Cohen's central claim is the animals have no rights - by definition. A right is a claim that someone (the recipient) exercises against someone else (the donor). Rights come from the constitution and law (trial by jury) or from prevailing moral codes (honouring a promise).

Consequently, he argues that rights can only arise among a community of moral agents - i.e. not animals. He makes a distinction between rights and obligations. The latter derive from personal commitments (shepherd/dog), status differences (adult/child), a special relationship (parent/child's tuition fees) or special circumstances (returning a favour).

Cohen argues that in order to carry out biomedical research the use of animals is essential.

What do you think?

On 28th June and 26th July the Philosophy group will be looking at Political Philosophy – why not come and join us?