

# Kant and singer: the moral status of animals

[Environment](#), [Animals](#)



Emmanuel Kant and Peter Singer expressed essentially opposing views on the moral status of animals. Because animals are non-rational creatures, Kant did not believe that they had any moral status. However, he did feel that human beings had a moral obligation to avoid cruelty to animals because being cruel was in opposition to the duty that mankind had to strengthen compassion in itself (MacKinnon, date, p. ). The duty to prevent cruelty to animals, then, is one that humanity owes to itself, not to the animal kingdom.

Peter Singer, however, believes that animals themselves are moral agents. Unlike Kant, Singer believes that “ animal interests are the basis for their having rights and rights that are equal to humans” (MacKinnon, date, pp. 363-364). MacKinnon goes on to explain that Singer bases his position on the theoretical foundation that animals’ experiences of pleasure fulfill one or more of their interests. Since animals appear to have interests similar to those of human beings, Singer believes that their interest should have equal weight to those of humans (p. 364).

Singer appears to write in opposition to the statement that treatment of two groups can differ and still be morally equivalent. His position indicates that by not recognizing animals’ equal right to those of human beings, that humans are guilty of “ speciesism,” a type of racism. For this reason, animals have a right to freedom from suffering. However, Singer also believes that it does not matter if an animal is not extended a right to vote, because an animal has no interest in voting (MacKinnon, date, pp. 363-364).

It would make sense to extend some rights, like that to be free from suffering, to animals. Other sensible rights that could be extended would be the right to sufficient food, water, and shelter. Other rights, such as the right to choose, the right to sexual freedom, and the right to medical care are arguable at best. It is never possible to know an animal's motivation for making a choice and sexual activity in animals is intended solely for survival of the species and not for pleasure. Extending these rights might change the way society treats animals; however, these acts are already expected from those individuals who harbor animals.

Although I would change the way that society treats animals, I do not feel that extending them rights is the answer. Instead, I feel that it is necessary to increase the penalties connected with animal cruelty violations, making certain degrees of cruelty felonies, rather than mere misdemeanors. Increasing or creating animal rights would only be possible by infringing on certain human rights. Unlike animals, we would be aware of this infringement and would be harmed by the change in our status.

## Reference

MacKinnon, B. (date). Ethics