

# Philosophical Perspectives on Animals by Dr. Ramona Ilea



Animal issues are often thought to be a 20<sup>th</sup>/21<sup>st</sup> century issue. But that's not the case at all.

Philosophers have written about animal issues for over 2,500 years.

## Ancients:

- Pythagoras** (c.570 - 490 BC): was vegetarian and had many followers. "Pythagorean" meant "vegetarian" until the 19<sup>th</sup> century
- Aristotle** (384-422 BCE): natural hierarchies: reason is superior to passion, men is superior to women, free men are superior to slaves, people are superior to animals
- Seneca** (4 BCE-65CE): was vegetarian in his youth; when old, he regrets that he gave it up in order to fit in and be more successful in politics

## International Perspectives:

- In 1000 BC, **Hindu Upanishads**
- Some Buddhists traditions**
- Jains** in India

## Kant (1724-1804):

We only have indirect duties to animals. Animals don't have intrinsic value, but we should not hurt them because doing so hurts humanity; being kind to animals is good because it benefits humanity

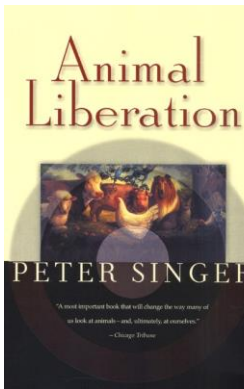
A lot of famous thinkers have discussed the moral status of animals

- **Descartes**: animals are like watches
- Favorable to animals: **Voltaire, Percy Shelley, Jeremy Bentham, J. S. Mill, Tolstoy, Gandhi**
- Lots of contemporary philosophers

A composite image featuring a text box at the top with a list of philosophers and portraits of six of them: Descartes, Voltaire, Bentham, Mill, Tolstoy, and Gandhi.

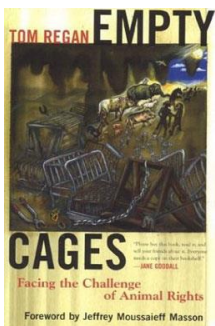
Sympathetic to the idea of animals deserving moral consideration: **Voltaire, Percy Shelley, Jeremy Bentham, Mill, Tolstoy, Gandhi**

Many contemporary philosophers (and other scholars) who have very different philosophical perspectives agree that animals deserve moral consideration. Here are just a few:



### Peter Singer:

- utilitarian approach
- the criterion for moral consideration is the ability to feel pain, so all animals that feel pain deserve moral consideration
- his book *Animal Liberation* is credited with starting the animal right movement
- ...although he does not believe in (the philosophical concept of) rights

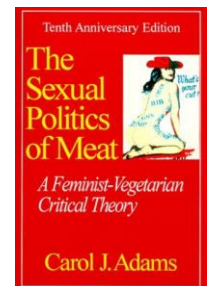


### Tom Regan:

- also considered the philosophical founder of the animal rights movement
- lots of books from the dry and rigorous philosophical texts to the more popular ones
- believes in (moral) rights
- lots of books, including *Empty Cages* (the most accessible)

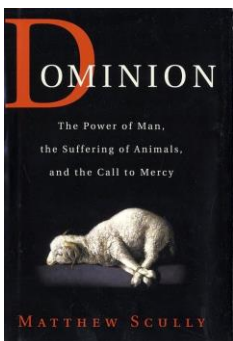
### Feminists

- (such as Carol Adams): women and animals (e.g. chickens) are objectified for their breasts and legs, or for their bodily functions (reproduction, milk)



### Legal Theorists

- See *Animal Rights: Current Debates and New Directions* for a good collection of articles by contemporary philosophers and legal scholars.
- I also sometimes teach an “Animal Legal Philosophy and Its Development” class at the Lewis & Clark Law School.



### Conservative and Religious Thinkers

- such as **Matthew Scully, author of *Dominion*** – senior speechwriter for George W. Bush and long time vegetarian – argue that we have dominion over animals, but this means we should *respect* God’s creation and not torture it in factory farms or hunt it for fun.