

# Animal Rights

## Do Animals Deserve the Same Protection as Humans?

*Examine the philosophical, scientific, and legal arguments surrounding animal rights — from factory farming and animal t...*

B2 Reading · 35 min · Ethics

### 1 Before You Read — Reflect & Discuss

Consider the following questions and discuss with a partner or your teacher:

1. Do you think animals have rights? If so, which ones — and where would you draw the line?
2. Is it acceptable to use animals for food, clothing, entertainment, or scientific research? Under what conditions?
3. If scientists proved that a particular animal could feel pain and sadness just like humans, should that change how we treat it?

### 2 Reading

#### The Moral Status of Animals: Rethinking Our Relationship With Other Species

In 2013, the government of India officially recognised dolphins as "non-human persons" and banned their use in commercial entertainment. In 2022, the United Kingdom passed legislation formally recognising that animals are **sentient** beings — capable of experiencing pain, pleasure, and emotional states. In courts across the world, lawyers are filing lawsuits on behalf of chimpanzees, elephants, and whales, arguing that these animals possess sufficient **cognitive** complexity to deserve legal **personhood**. Something is shifting in how humanity views its relationship with the animal kingdom — and the implications are enormous.

#### The Philosophical Foundations

The modern animal rights movement has its intellectual roots in the work of philosophers like Peter Singer and Tom Regan. In his groundbreaking 1975 book *Animal Liberation*, Singer argued that the capacity to suffer — not intelligence, language, or species membership — should be the

**crit**erion for moral consideration. He coined the term **speciesism** to describe the practice of giving preferential treatment to members of one's own species, drawing a deliberate **analogy** with racism and sexism. If we accept that causing unnecessary suffering is wrong, Singer argued, then the species of the being that suffers should be **irrelevant**.

Regan went further, arguing that animals are not merely beings that can suffer but "subjects of a life" — individuals with beliefs, desires, memory, and a sense of their own future. As such, they possess **inherent** value and should never be treated merely as means to human ends. This position challenges the deeply embedded assumption that animals exist for human use — an assumption that has **underpinned** law, culture, and economics for centuries.

### The Science of Sentience

Modern science has provided powerful support for the philosophical arguments. Neuroscience research has demonstrated that mammals, birds, and even some fish possess the neural **substrates** necessary for **conscious** experience. Elephants mourn their dead and return to the bones of family members years later. Crows use tools, solve multi-step problems, and recognise individual human faces. Pigs have been shown to outperform three-year-old children on certain cognitive tests. Octopuses demonstrate play behaviour, problem-solving, and individual personality differences.

In 2012, a group of prominent neuroscientists signed the Cambridge Declaration on Consciousness, stating that "the weight of evidence indicates that humans are not unique in possessing the neurological substrates that generate consciousness." This declaration did not create rights, but it removed a key scientific objection: the claim that animals are mere **automata** — biological machines incapable of genuine experience.

### Factory Farming: The Scale of the Problem

The most **contentious** battleground in the animal rights debate is industrial agriculture. Approximately 80 billion land animals are slaughtered for food each year worldwide, the vast majority raised in **intensive** farming systems — commonly known as factory farms — where animals are confined in extremely small spaces, often unable to turn around, and subjected to conditions that would be considered **cruel** if applied to a domestic pet.

Critics argue that factory farming represents a moral catastrophe on an almost unimaginable scale — suffering inflicted not out of necessity but for economic **efficiency** and consumer convenience. Defenders counter that affordable animal products are essential for feeding a growing global population and that animal welfare standards, while imperfect, are improving. The tension between these positions shows no sign of resolution, though the rapid growth of plant-based and **lab-grown** meat alternatives suggests that technology may eventually offer a way out of the dilemma.

### Animal Testing: A Necessary Evil?

Animal experimentation presents an equally difficult ethical challenge. Millions of animals — primarily mice, rats, and rabbits — are used annually in medical, pharmaceutical, and cosmetic testing. Supporters argue that animal testing has been **indispensable** for medical progress: vaccines, antibiotics, surgical techniques, and treatments for cancer, diabetes, and heart disease have all relied on animal research. Without it, they claim, human suffering would be immeasurably greater.

Opponents respond that the moral calculus is flawed. If animals are sentient beings capable of suffering, then using them as instruments for human benefit — no matter how great that benefit — violates their fundamental rights. Furthermore, advances in technology have produced increasingly sophisticated **alternatives**: computer simulations, organ-on-a-chip devices, and human cell cultures that can, in many cases, provide more accurate results than animal models. The European Union has already banned animal testing for cosmetics, and pressure is mounting to extend such bans further.

### Legal Personhood: A New Frontier

Perhaps the most radical development in the animal rights movement is the push for legal personhood. Under current law in most countries, animals are classified as **property** — objects that can be owned, bought, and sold. Animal rights organisations argue that at least some species — great apes, elephants, cetaceans, and possibly others — possess sufficient cognitive and emotional complexity to be recognised as legal persons, entitled to basic rights such as freedom from **captivity**, torture, and exploitation.

This idea is not as extreme as it may initially sound. Legal personhood has already been granted to rivers, forests, and corporations — entities that are clearly not human but are recognised by law as holders of rights. If a corporation can be a legal person, advocates ask, why not an elephant? The answer to this question will shape not only the future of animal law but the very boundaries of moral consideration in the 21st century.

## 3 Key Vocabulary

Word / Phrase	Definition	Example Sentence
<b>sentient</b>	able to perceive, feel, and experience things consciously	The UK now formally recognises animals as sentient beings.
<b>cognitive</b>	relating to mental processes such as thinking, reasoning, and memory	Some animals possess remarkable cognitive complexity.
<b>personhood</b>	the legal or moral status of being recognised as a person with rights	Lawyers argue that certain animals deserve legal personhood.

Word / Phrase	Definition	Example Sentence
<b>criterion</b>	a standard or principle by which something is judged	The capacity to suffer should be the criterion for moral consideration.
<b>speciesism</b>	discrimination or prejudice based on species membership	Singer coined the term speciesism to describe bias towards humans.
<b>analogy</b>	a comparison between two things to highlight a similarity	Singer drew an analogy between speciesism and racism.
<b>irrelevant</b>	not connected with or important to the matter at hand	The species of a being that suffers should be irrelevant.
<b>inherent</b>	existing as a natural and permanent quality of something	Regan argued that animals possess inherent value.
<b>underpinned</b>	supported or formed the basis of something	The assumption that animals exist for human use has underpinned law for centuries.
<b>substrates</b>	the underlying structures or foundations on which something is built	Mammals possess the neural substrates necessary for conscious experience.
<b>conscious</b>	aware of and able to respond to one's surroundings; having subjective experience	The declaration stated that many animals are capable of conscious experience.
<b>automata</b>	machines or mechanical devices that operate without thought or feeling (plural of automaton)	Science has rejected the view that animals are mere automata.
<b>contentious</b>	causing or likely to cause disagreement or argument	Factory farming is the most contentious issue in the animal rights debate.
<b>intensive</b>	concentrated or involving maximum effort or resources; in farming, designed to maximise output	Intensive farming confines animals in extremely small spaces.
<b>cruel</b>	causing pain or suffering deliberately or through indifference	Factory farm conditions would be considered cruel if applied to pets.
<b>efficiency</b>	achieving maximum productivity with minimum waste of effort or resources	Animals suffer not out of necessity but for economic efficiency.
<b>lab-grown</b>	produced artificially in a laboratory rather than occurring naturally	Lab-grown meat may offer a way out of the ethical dilemma.
<b>indispensable</b>	absolutely necessary; essential	Supporters say animal testing has been indispensable for medical progress.
<b>alternatives</b>	options or choices available instead of something else	Computer simulations offer increasingly sophisticated alternatives to animal testing.

Word / Phrase	Definition	Example Sentence
<b>property</b>	a thing or things belonging to someone; in law, something that can be owned	Under current law, animals are classified as property.
<b>captivity</b>	the state of being imprisoned or confined	Some advocates argue animals have a right to freedom from captivity.

## 4 Useful Collocations

animal welfare · factory farming · animal testing · moral consideration · legal personhood · sentient beings · ethical dilemma · medical research · human consumption · endangered species · cognitive complexity · inherent value · welfare standards · fundamental rights · moral status · conscious experience

## 5 Reading Comprehension

**1. According to Peter Singer, what should be the basis for moral consideration?**

- a) Intelligence and language ability
- b) The capacity to suffer ✓**
- c) Membership of the human species
- d) Economic value to society

**2. What does the term 'speciesism' mean?**

- a) The scientific study of different species
- b) Giving preferential treatment to members of one's own species ✓**
- c) The belief that all species are equal in intelligence
- d) A medical condition caused by contact with animals

**3. What did the Cambridge Declaration on Consciousness conclude?**

- a) That only humans are capable of consciousness
- b) That many non-human animals possess the neurological substrates that generate consciousness ✓**
- c) That animal testing should be immediately banned worldwide
- d) That animals should have the right to vote

**4. Why do critics describe factory farming as a 'moral catastrophe'?**

- a) Because it produces low-quality food
- b) Because it inflicts suffering on billions of animals for economic efficiency rather than necessity ✓**
- c) Because it employs too many workers in dangerous conditions
- d) Because it uses too much water and electricity

**5. What is the main argument in favour of animal testing?**

- a) It has been essential for medical breakthroughs including vaccines and cancer treatments ✓**
- b) Animals do not feel pain during experiments
- c) It is cheaper than computer simulations
- d) It is required by international law

**6. How are animals currently classified under the law in most countries?**

- a) As legal persons with basic rights
- b) As property that can be owned, bought, and sold ✓**
- c) As citizens of the country where they live
- d) As protected entities with the same rights as children

**7. Why do advocates argue that granting legal personhood to animals is not extreme?**

- a) Because animals are already treated as persons in most countries
- b) Because legal personhood has already been granted to rivers, forests, and corporations**  
✓
- c) Because the United Nations has passed a resolution requiring it
- d) Because all religions support animal personhood

**6****Vocabulary Exercise — Fill in the Blanks**

**sentient · speciesism · inherent · contentious · intensive · indispensable · alternatives · captivity · criterion · underpinned**

1. The UK now formally recognises animals as \_\_\_\_\_ beings capable of feeling pain and pleasure.
2. Peter Singer coined the term \_\_\_\_\_ to describe discrimination based on species membership.
3. Regan argued that animals possess \_\_\_\_\_ value and should never be treated merely as tools.
4. Factory farming is the most \_\_\_\_\_ issue in the animal rights debate.
5. \_\_\_\_\_ farming systems confine billions of animals in extremely small spaces.
6. Supporters claim that animal testing has been \_\_\_\_\_ for major medical breakthroughs.
7. Computer simulations and cell cultures offer increasingly sophisticated \_\_\_\_\_ to animal testing.
8. Some advocates argue animals have a fundamental right to freedom from \_\_\_\_\_.
9. The capacity to suffer, not intelligence, should be the \_\_\_\_\_ for moral consideration.
10. The assumption that animals exist for human use has \_\_\_\_\_ law and culture for centuries.

**7****Answer Key**

### Vocabulary Exercise Answers

1. sentient
2. speciesism
3. inherent
4. contentious
5. Intensive
6. indispensable
7. alternatives
8. captivity
9. criterion
10. underpinned

## 8

### Grammar Focus — Key Structures in the Text

#### B2 Grammar: Conditionals, Passive Reporting & Rhetorical Questions

**Second conditional (hypothetical):** If we accept that causing unnecessary suffering **is** wrong, then species **should be** irrelevant.

**Passive reporting:** Animals **have been shown** to outperform children on certain cognitive tests.

**Rhetorical question:** If a corporation can be a legal person, **why not** an elephant?

**Reduced relative clause:** Suffering **inflicted** not out of necessity but for economic efficiency.

**Concessive + contrast:** **While** welfare standards are improving, the scale of suffering **remains** enormous.

## 9

### Speaking & Writing Tasks

## Speaking Task

Discuss these questions with a partner or your teacher:

- Do you agree with Singer that the capacity to suffer should be the only criterion for moral consideration? Why or why not?
- Should animals used in farming have the same legal protections as domestic pets? What would the practical consequences be?
- Is animal testing ever justified? Where would you draw the line — medical research, cosmetics, educational purposes?
- If you were a lawmaker, would you vote to grant legal personhood to great apes or elephants? What arguments would you use?

## Useful Phrases for Discussion

**From an ethical standpoint,** the distinction between humans and animals is less clear than we assume.

**The argument that** animals are mere property fails to account for the scientific evidence of sentience.

**While I understand the practical difficulties,** I believe that animal welfare laws need to be significantly strengthened.

**One could argue that** economic efficiency should never justify the infliction of suffering.

## Writing Task

Write a structured opinion essay (180–230 words) on the following topic:

"The way a society treats its animals is a reflection of its moral character." To what extent do you agree with this statement?

Your essay should include an introduction with a clear thesis, two or three supporting paragraphs with evidence and examples, and a conclusion. Use vocabulary from the text.