A more modern understanding of how animals in fact work, and how they share a lot of their characteristics with us might cause us to empathize with their suffering and recognize that they ought not to be treated in certain ways.

4. Ecological Implications

Does it make sense to extend rights to the natural world itself? Can ecosystems have rights? Can the ocean? Can plants?

On first glance these questions might seem absurd. But it has been pointed out that man’s relation to animals, and by extension the natural world, has had great consequences for our shared existence. Maybe the best thing animal rights can give us is a greater respect for the natural world.

Would there be runaway pollution and the danger of climate change if human civilisation had been based on a respect and concern for non-human life? And following on from Kant, would humans treat each other better too?

Of course, let’s not get carried away, Hitler was a vegetarian. But it still seems reasonable to think that refining your understanding of what can suffer and how, refining your understanding of what reasons give is cause to act morally, and removing old dogmas based on superstition, and prejudice, and legal issues, we might actually develop a better world both for human and animals.

Animals rights has many problems, in that people feels that it wrongly interferes in human concerns, for example those who protest against medical testing, even some extreme groups that target human life for hurting animal life.

But if you take a wider view of human history, we have surely move a long way from years before v 1.5 cruelty to animals was legitimate entertainment to now when it is a legal offence.