

# A Pet's Endgame

Bhante Bodhidhamma · Tips of the Day · 2 min read

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This essay came about because someone got in touch with me about their poorly cat. They decided in the end to attend to her until she died. Western understanding of animals begins with Aristotle. He argued that animals have no moral responsibility and therefore no rights. But then slaves also had none – and women! St. Thomas Aquinas, the great Christian philosopher of the middle ages, then declared they did not have souls. That means that they are temporary creations by God who annihilate on death, for only souls are eternal. The final nail in the coffin took away sentience from animals. Descartes said they were simply machines, automata – they cannot reason or feel pain. <http://www.animaethics.org.uk/descartes.html> The Buddha on the other hand, as do the other religions of India, declared that animals are sentient beings. Anyone who has owned a pet intuitively knows when their dog or cat is suffering just as we do when another human suffers. (After all we only take their word for it. We cannot feel another's pain!) Again the Buddha taught that all sentient beings have *tanha* – unwholesome desire, but also that all beings could act virtuously. Do Animals Have Morals TED And that they also take rebirth! And that it was their ethical actions, just as for ourselves that was the determinant factor as to how they would fare on. This only makes sense if we define ethics in the broadest terms as relationship. It seems, therefore, that we ought to treat dying animals as we would humans. We should try to take as much pain out of their dying process, make them as comfortable as we can, and let nature take its course. If the pain cannot be relieved, then to end their lives maybe the compassionate thing to do. This brings into sharp relief what might our personal intention be to put an end to a suffering animal's life? Is it because we ourselves can't bear to see them suffer? Or is it because it will cost too much to keep her going and she will die anyway. It may, of course, be too costly. Or because we are not acknowledging that we don't want the bother of caring for an old or sick animal and rationalise the killing. Such motivations are unwholesome, and will not improve our own karmic fruit. The one wholesome motivation would be compassion for our pet and the wish to relieve their suffering. Supposing now we have various intentions in the mind – a situation we find more often than not. When the time comes to make a decision, we make sure that the right intention is the fully conscious one by repeating it to ourselves. This means that intention has been empowered and not the other ones.

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