

# The Politics of Animal Rights Advocacy

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## ABSTRACT

*The main aim of this paper is to make the case that the politics of animal rights advocacy rests with establishing the moral and legal status of animals as a public policy issue. Presently, animal rights is primarily framed as an optional lifestyle choice. It is not understood as a matter for mainstream politics, including public policy, the policies of political parties, regulations and legislation. Starting with Barbara Noske's concept of the animal industrial complex, I consider the present status of the many traditions, cultural norms, economic and other incentives which license our instrumental use animals for human gain. I propose a five-part evaluation process of social movements and use it to evaluate the modern animal rights movement. I critique its present strategy with its emphasis on personal lifestyle choice as inadequate in challenging the animal industrial complex. I conclude the modern animal rights movement must implement a long-term strategy which advances animal issues as public policy, which is in addition to its present strategy promoting optional vegan, cruelty-free lifestyle choice.*

*Keywords:* Advocacy, animal rights, industrial complex, lifestyle, moral crusade, otherness, policy, social movement, strategy, vegan.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The publication of *Animal Liberation* by Peter Singer in 1975 is usually recognised as the start of the animal rights movement (Singer [1975] 1990). It was not until 1983 and the publication of *The Case for Animal Rights* by Tom Regan that a rights-based argument for animals was made (Regan 1983). While agreeing with Singer that animals are sentient, Regan rejected utilitarianism as animal interests always run the risk of being trumped by human needs.

Philosophers such as Singer and Regan influenced the animal rights movement in its understanding of the moral and legal status of animals.

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The animal rights movement sought to influence public opinion, encourage vegan, cruelty-free living, change public policy, and pass laws. Notwithstanding almost a half century of animal activism, particularly the promotion of vegan, cruelty-free living, the human exploitation of other animals is unabated. The animal rights movement has yet to challenge in any meaningful way the animal industrial complex. The 'animal industrial complex' is the term used to describe the many traditions, institutions and industries which transform animals into products and services for human consumption.

Debate about the politics of animal rights advocacy is necessary to inform the animal rights movement of the way in which it can successfully challenge the animal industrial complex. The main aim of this paper is to make the case that ending the use of animals in such areas as agriculture, entertainment and research is the responsibility of society as a matter of public policy.

## 2. ANIMAL INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX

Anthropologist Barbara Noske first identified the animal industrial complex as the accumulation of interests responsible for institutionalised animal exploitation. "Animals have become reduced to mere appendages of computers and machines", she wrote (Noske 1989, 20). The presence of the animal industrial complex is so pervasive that its existence often goes unrecognised and unacknowledged.

Two turning points signify the shift in human attitudes toward animals and their institutionalised exploitation. The first is Chicago and its stockyards and slaughterhouses which operated from 1865 for some 100 years. The second turning point occurred after World War Two when traditional extensive farming practices were replaced by intensive industrial production to produce meat, eggs and dairy. The Chicago stockyards and factory farming are two primary examples of the animal industrial complex and how, since the industrial revolution, it commodified the production, slaughter and consumption of billions of animals. Underpinning the animal industrial complex were western orthodox Judeo-Christian religious belief systems and the materialism of scientific reductionism (White 1967; Morrison 2009). They reinforced human prejudice in its assumption that other animals exist for human use (Leahy 1991; Scruton 1996). Religion and science also provided a foundation to patriarchy, which situated man as superior to women, children, animals and nature (Gaard 1993, Kheel 2008). Embedded within patriarchy is the notion of the 'other'. Women,

children, animals, and nature are the other. “He is the Subject, he is the Absolute”, wrote Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex*, “she is the Other” (de Beauvoir 1986, 16). As women are the other to men, so, animals are the other to humans. Otherness empowers power and control, which licenses exploitation. As misogyny is the hatred of women by men, misothery is human “hatred and contempt for animals” (Mason 1993, 163). Otherness also causes invisibility. Carol J. Adams describes in *The Sexual Politics of Meat* the presence of animals in meat as the “absent referent” (Adams [1990] 2010). The meat on a plate can range in appearance from the explicit (e.g. one entire fish cooked and served whole) to the implicit (e.g. ground beef in a burger made from multiple animals). Ultimately, these norms and values produce *lebensunwertes Leben* or life unworthy of life (Lifton 1986, 21). The animal industrial complex renders the lives of animals as life unworthy of life.

Animal exploitation, as an established and accepted practice, perpetuates and legitimises itself, while hiding from the consequences of its actions. The true economic consequences of animal exploitation are not met by the animal industrial complex but by consumers and society. The animal industrial complex is also enabled with government approved programs (e.g. trade agreements, financial incentives, tax credits, exemptions from the law) whose costs are met again by taxpayers. The animal industrial complex favours privatisation and government deregulation to ensure it supervises itself with voluntary standards. The priority for the animal industrial complex is to protect its profits and other entitlements.

The animal industrial complex has a self interest in over stating the benefits to its exploitation of animals. It wishes to manipulate public opinion to fear any change in their use of animals. As Noske asks, “*which* human needs are being fulfilled and *whose* interests are promoted by the existing animal industrial complex?” (1989, 23; emphasis in original). It is doubtful that all of the products and services derived from animal exploitation are essential for our survival. Of course, when asked about animal rights, people are going to express concern about giving up any pleasure (e.g. eating meat) or losing any benefit (e.g. safe products) they may feel is their prerogative. But the deeper people’s understanding, particularly in areas considered egregious (e.g. fox hunting, testing of cosmetics on animals), the less fear there is of a loss of pleasure or benefit. Sympathy for animals, when they are particularly cruelly treated and where there is a willingness to forgo any perceived or real benefits by the public, is demonstrated in the public’s support for legislation and other public policy measures restricting or prohibiting animal cruelty and exploitation (for information on public opinion and animal rights, see Humane Research Council 2012).

The dominance of the animal industrial complex is emboldened by the animal rights movement, particularly with its emphasis on vegan, cruelty-free living. While it deserves recognition for ending some egregious use of animals and taking advantage of the opportunities for new markets in consumerism (e.g. meat-free, vegetarian, and cruelty-free vegan), the animal industrial complex does so without any commitment to ending its institutionalised violence toward animals. This has the effect of weakening the animal rights movement's call for moral and legal rights for animals by ensuring the problem of animal exploitation remains as an optional personal lifestyle choice. While genuine cooperation between the animal rights movement and the animal industrial complex is an important strategy, the former must avoid being used by the latter, even unwittingly, to legitimise and even perpetuate institutional animal exploitation.

Political campaigns which call for public policy to end animal exploitation will mobilise vast financial resources from the animal industrial complex to ensure its profitable use of animals survives. There is, of course, enormous profits to be made from animal exploitation. These profits are protected by existing arrangements with governments and their regulatory mechanisms thereby ensuring the continuation of animal exploitation. The animal industrial complex has a proven history of collusion with private security forces and state law enforcement to monitor, pervert and harm the animal rights movement. It is, therefore, not surprising that animal-related public policy is more about protecting our interests in what we do to them than in protecting them from us. Animals are represented in public policy by those who benefit from the power and control they exert over them. Animal researchers (not anti-vivisectionists) and animal farmers (not vegans) are more likely to be members of the policy-making networks which determine regulations and laws governing our relations with animals.

### 3. THE POLITICS OF ANIMAL RIGHTS ADVOCACY

The emphasis placed by the animal rights movement in the strategy to convince everyone to adopt a vegan, cruelty-free lifestyle choice suggests that it sees itself as a moral crusade. Generally, moral crusades are one specific issue which is framed as an exclusive cause with extraordinary meaning embedding a religious, spiritual, political or moral belief as an integral component. Moral crusades rely upon campaigns which trigger moral shocks to provoke public debates. An extraordinary situation or conflict, which may receive unprecedented attention from the public or the media or both, may be called a moral panic.

Moral crusades can be controversial issues relating to lifestyle choice (e.g. alcohol consumption and recreational or illegal drug use), sexual activity (e.g. pornography, homosexuality, monogamy) or issues of individual freedom (e.g. abortion, euthanasia, death penalty). Generally, moral crusades are social movements whose missions address fundamental and profound issues relating to human activity, the relationship humans have with their perception of themselves and their place in society. The animal rights movement at present behaves more like a moral crusade than a social movement with its emphasis on personal lifestyle choice. Jeff Goodwin and James M. Jasper define social movements as “collective, organized, sustained, and noninstitutional challenge to authorities, powerholders, or cultural beliefs and practices” (Goodwin and Jasper 2002, 3).

The academic study of social movements by sociologists and political scientists offers insight into the animal rights movement as a social movement. Further, the writings of social movement practitioners (e.g. studies, histories, biographies, memoirs) also provide lessons to learn from their experiences. For example, the animal rights literature includes biographies (Williamson 2005; Fitzgerald 2008; Greenwald 2009) and movement studies and histories (Finsen and Finsen 1994; Munro 2005; Phelps 2007). Further, sociologists and political scientists include the animal rights movement in their research (Jasper 1997; Grant 2000; Crossley 2002).

In his book, *Eco-Wars*, political scientist Ronald T. Libby discusses analysis of the animal rights movement by Bill Rempel, a research scientist in animal agribusiness at the Department of Animal Science at the University of Minnesota (Libby 1998, 62-3). Rempel makes the case that the industry’s perception of the political influence of animal rights groups passes through four stages. The animal rights movement develops, politicises, legislates and litigates an issue. From my experience with the animal rights movement, I conclude he was partially correct. Therefore, I have adapted it to the following five stages.

1. Public education, when people are enlightened about the issue and embrace it into their lives.
2. Public policy development, when political parties, businesses, schools, professional associations and other entities that constitute society adopt sympathetic positions on the issue.
3. Legislation, when laws are passed on the issue.
4. Implementation, when laws and other public policy instruments are enforced on the issue.
5. Public acceptance, when the issue is embedded into the values of society.

This is the lifespan of a successful social movement, as it emerges from obscurity to acceptance. The five stage analysis makes it possible to deter-

mine which stage is reached by a social movement, what is next, and why some organisations and issues fail, stagnate or succeed. Most issues start in stage one and expand to the others, but not always in a clear sequential order. For any social movement to achieve its mission it must pass through each of the five stages and maintain an active engagement in each one. In doing so, its ability to resist setbacks, obstacles and opposition from opponents is diminished increasingly. In other words, as a social movement expands its presence in each stage while maintaining activities in each one, the power and control that any opposition may wield against it is further weakened.

The five stages illustrate the transition animal advocates must make from moral crusader to political activist and the animal rights movement from a moral crusade to a political movement. We can never assume a growing collective of personal lifestyle change automatically leads to institutional, societal change. The capriciousness of human nature is subject to change. Institutionalised regulations and laws are much more entrenched expressions of society's values.

I conclude the animal rights movement is mostly in Stage One (Public Education), with some presence in Stages Two (Public Policy), Three (Legislation) and Four (Implementation). If Stages One and Two are the moral crusade, Stages Three and Four are the political movement. Inevitably, the animal rights movement confronts the animal industrial complex because of its instrumental use of animals. The arenas in which this conflict is played out include public opinion, public policy, legislation, law and society generally. But the animal rights movement is not competent for these encounters. Its understanding of the animal industrial complex, and institutional animal exploitation, is limited to optional personal lifestyle choice. Animal rights is not understood as a mainstream political issue.

In contrast to the animal rights movement, the animal industrial complex, which does understand the politics of animal exploitation, is resolutely entrenched and fully engaged in all five stages. Which stage would the animal industrial complex want the animal rights movement to be in? Its answer would be the stage we currently occupy, Stage One (Public Education). Further, it will do everything in its power to ensure the animal rights movement maintains this position. This is because the first stage is the beginning and the stage with least influence of all the five stages.

#### 4. NEW STRATEGY FOR THE ANIMAL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

Why is the animal rights movement entrenched in Stage One? The answer lies in how people become animal advocates.

With the exception of those who were raised by vegans or vegetarians and educated about animal cruelty and exploitation, people become animal advocates because they experience a personal transformative moment.

Everyone who is an advocate for animals has a compelling personal story. These unique narratives describe how they were transformed from someone who ate meat and fish to a vegetarian or vegan. Personal transformative moments may be triggered by a variety of experiences, including reading a book, watching a film, speaking with a friend, witnessing animal cruelty, experiencing a profound relationship with a companion animal, and so on.

Tom Regan describes in *Empty Cages* three types of animal advocates (Regan 2004, 21-8). The Damascan, who has a startling revelation. The Muddler, who struggles with the challenge of animal rights throughout their life. The Davincian, who intuitively understood all along. Ken Shapiro also characterises animal advocates as Caring Sleuths, who discover, seek and embrace the suffering of animals (Shapiro 2007).

These personality types help to illustrate who animal advocates are and how they each arrived from different places. Also, they help to explain why animal advocates are a diverse group of people who do not always agree. The personal transformative moment is powerful. So compelling, in fact, that it overwhelmingly informs the rationale of most of the animal rights movement's current strategy to educate the public. This is why the calendar of the animal rights movement falls mostly into Stage One Public Education: media stunts, information dissemination, demonstrations, advertising campaigns, personal appeals by celebrities and so on. These are all attempts by the animal rights movement to influence people, essentially, to go vegan.

By emphasising personal lifestyle choice over institutional change, the animal rights movement pursues a strategy which is not fit for purpose and impedes severely its ability to achieve institutional change. A new strategy, with equal emphasis in action at the level of the individual and society, is needed. The animal rights movement, only then, will be in a better position to succeed in achieving its mission and confronting the animal industrial complex. Framing animal rights as a political movement emphasises a strategy which moves from the individual to society, an approach that includes public policy, legislation and law enforcement. This choice in strategy is reflected in how its mission is viewed. Generally, animal rights is seen as a demand for individual lifestyle change. In contrast, as a political move-

ment, the animal rights mission calls for the transformation of society and its relationship with animals.

## 5. THE POLITICS OF ANIMAL RIGHTS ADVOCACY

It is customary to portray Britain as a nation of animal lovers. From its origins in the 1800s to the 1970s, the public supported a social movement for animals whose dominant ideology was animal welfare. Britain's timid but sincere animal welfare movement tried to make itself relevant in the "Swinging Sixties" with its traditional message of kindness to animals. But the 1970s was a decade of political and social unrest. It saw the emergence of such political ideologies and social movements as feminism, environmentalism, peace, multiculturalism, and gay liberation. It was, perhaps, inevitable that the animal rights movement would be also established in the 1970s as a social movement to accomplish animal liberation. Animal welfare organisations, including the *Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals*, were forced to respond to these changing times and the increasing presence of animal rights. Animal welfare supporters, who were mostly middle-class women, found themselves confronted by a new wave of animal rights advocates, who were younger men and women. Many were working class. They were not afraid to challenge traditions. They were vegetarians and vegans. They spoke of animal rights. They sabotaged fox hunts, demonstrated outside circuses with performing animals, and broke into research laboratories, causing property damage, and liberating rats, mice and dogs.

The ideology of the modern social movement for animals includes individuals, local groups and national and international organisations who work together sometimes but often do not. The movement includes two primary ideological camps: animal welfare and animal rights. But to view the movement just as a welfare/rights divide is to simplify a complex social movement and overlook its most important challenge.

Notwithstanding its ideological complexity and factional constitution, the modern social movement for animals is making progress in educating the public about the moral and legal status of animals and, to a much lesser extent, influencing public policy makers and elected representatives. The challenge of the politics of animal rights advocacy, however, is to understand why the social movement for animals persists in focussing more on public opinion than the law.

For many years, Robert Garner has stood out as the primary political theorist exploring the political status of animals (Garner [1993] 2004;



1998; 2005a; 2005b). His current research considers society's treatment of animals within the context of justice and the application of ideal and non-ideal theory to animal ethics with respect to legislation related to regulating and ending animal suffering (Garner forthcoming). New research in the political status of animals is being led by Siobhan O'Sullivan in *Animals, Equality and Democracy* (2011) and Sue Donaldson and Will Kymlicka in *Zoopolis: a Political Theory of Animal Rights* (2011) and others.

O'Sullivan makes the case that existing inconsistencies within the law relating to animals should be addressed. For example, laws relating to dogs as companion animals and research tools are different. Clearly, this difference reflects the nature of the relationship between dogs and people. One is a companion animals. The other is a research tool. The law which establishes the highest standard of animal welfare should be applied consistently wherever the law relates to that species, regardless of the circumstances. In other words, the law should be the same for the same species in different circumstances.

The approach that Donaldson and Kymlicka take is to apply political theories on citizenship to animals. Our varied relationships with animals have their own moral complexities which have, in turn, political consequences.

Some animals should be seen as forming separate sovereign communities on their own territories (animals in the wild vulnerable to human invasion and colonisation); some animals are akin to migrants or denizens who choose to move into areas of human habitation (liminal opportunistic animals); and some animals should be seen as full citizens of the polity because of the way they have been bred over generations for interdependence with humans (domesticated animals). (Donaldson and Kymlicka 2011, 14)

The debate about animal ethics engaged by Singer, Regan, and others is augmented by the debate about politics and animals made by Garner, O'Sullivan, Donaldson, Kymlicka, and others. It is one thing to claim moral rights for animals. It is something else to persuade society and its representational governments to recognise legal rights for animals, including enforcement by the state with its legal apparatus.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Most, if not all, social movements struggle with the question of fundamentalism and *real politik* or abolition and regulation. Often, they fail to resolve it successfully. The animal rights movement is no exception (Francione and Garner 2010). Frequently, this tension is framed as an exclusive choice. I

do not support this view. Both are needed to help the other achieve the change they seek. The challenge is to learn how to direct strategies simultaneously and complementarily. This is why animal rights is more than just a moral crusade pursuing idealistic goals of abolition. It is also a pragmatic social movement working to embed the values of animal rights into public policy (Stallwood 1996). The politics of animal rights advocacy informs not only the debate about the nature of the present moral and legal status of animals but also how to embed the values of animal rights into society.

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