The Politics of Animal Rights: Making the Human Connection

Jim Mason
Animal Rights Network, Inc.

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The History of a Mind.

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Jim Mason

Animal Rights is in the air, so much so that the term borders on becoming a buzzword and the cause itself the latest form of radical chic. Although Lewis Gom­pertz, Henry S. Salt and others put forth radically different views on attitudes and relations toward other animals more than a century ago, the publication in 1972 of essays by Brigid Brophy, Richard Ryder and others in the book, Animals, Men and Morals (London: Gollancz, 1971; New York: Taplinger, 1972) and the more popular book, Animal Liberation, by Peter Singer (New York Review, 1975) have sparked another wave of these views and have inspired a spate of college courses, articles in both academic and popular periodicals and radio and television programs on the subject of animal rights. We are reaching the public now with better analyses and better ways of explaining why humans should stop abusing and using other species.

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paigns—old wine in new bottles, so to speak. Also, some animal rights advocates may be trampled in the rush to get media coverage, and the survivors may be "had" by media outlets which because of time or space limitations and constraints on con­tent imposed by advertisers, characteristically deal with only the most sensational, superficial or harmless aspects of any subject. In both cases we face a danger that

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J. Mason Comment

the full meaning and implications of the case for animal rights/liberation will be lost in the shuffle and be assigned some stereotyped image that has no relevance to its substance. If that happens, we go back into the closet of political irrelevance with other crank causes for another umpteen dozen years. In the meantime, animals will still suffer and more species will become extinct.

To head off these developments, I suggest that our movement emphasize the human connection, but I mean a real connection through personal and political ac­tion and not merely one of argument. One way to make this connection is to identify the forces and institutions under human control that perpetuate exploitation of ani­

mals; the other is to identify how animal-hating and -exploitative habits affects people.

In the first part of the effort, we are up against a consortium of industries and institutions that thrive on consumer demand for meat, milk, eggs, leather, drugs, medicines and a host of nonproducts from animals such as companionship, entertainment and biological data. The demand comes from a society with deeply rooted, long-held habits of using animals for food, work, sports and other purposes. It is a self-sustaining cycle: Industry profits, and in the case of nonprofit institutions, contributions are plowed back into research and development programs that rein­

force the habits and bolster demand. Society might be willing to make changes, but the industries and institutions which it put in business tend to resist them. We will have to determine how to break these cycles if we want to advance the cause of ani­

mal rights/liberation. To do that, we will have to extend the sweep of our movement. Our promotion of vegetarian and vegan diets and our campaigns against specific abuses do not run far and deep enough to produce the necessary social, economic and technological changes.

This brings us to the second part of the human connection. We need to locate our cause on the map of human concerns so that it can be perceived and un­

stood as relevant to other social and ethical causes. It has already been done on paper, but the movement as such does not follow through with the action behind its rhetoric. Singer’s case for animal liberation begins with the position that discrimina­

tion based on race or gender is immoral and goes on to state that “speciesism”, a related form of discrimination, is likewise immoral. One would expect that every animal rights/liberation advocate would then necessarily embrace this basic posi­

tion. To be sure, many animal activists oppose racism and sexism, but more, it seems, out of coincidence than from animal liberation convictions. Sadly, I keep coming across advocates of animal rights who either ignore or verbally attack the messages of (what should be) our companion movements against racism, sexism and other forms of discrimination among our own species. This strikes me as worse than a lapse in adhering to animal liberation principles. It is misanthropy and misogyny, that is, forms of specicism—the very prejudice we claim to oppose. Moreover, since we are a political movement (if we are not, then what are we doing?), we ought to know better than to antagonize parallel, perhaps potentially supportive movements. If our moral principles against prejudicial attitudes and practices really mean anything to us, should we not have the personal conviction to act politically as a whole follow through with political action? Without such commitment, we will be not only hypocrites but failures.

This is where our movement is most lacking. Our failure to speak, act and live according to our own basic principles isolates us from the rest of progressive poli­

tics; it makes us appear irrelevant (“kooky”), and it contributes to the perception that our case is academic rather than political.
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To head off these developments, I suggest that our movement emphasize the human connection, but I mean a real connection through personal and political action and not merely one of argument. One way to make this connection is to identify the forces and institutions under human control that perpetuate exploitation of animals; the other is to identify how animal-hating and -exploitative habits affect people.

In the first part of the effort, we are up against a consortium of industries and institutions that thrive on consumer demand for meat, milk, eggs, leather, drugs, medicines and a host of nonproducts from animals such as companionship, entertainment and biological data. The demand comes from a society with deeply rooted, long-held habits of using animals for food, work, sports and other purposes. It is a self-sustaining cycle: Industry profits, and in the case of nonprofit institutions, contributions are plowed back into research and development programs that reinforce the habits and bolster demand. Society might be willing to make changes, but the industries and institutions which it put in business tend to resist them. We will have to determine how to break these cycles if we want to advance the cause of animal rights/liberation. To do that, we will have to extend the sweep of our movement. Our promotion of vegetarian and vegan diets and our campaigns against specific abuses do not run far and deep enough to produce the necessary social, economic and technological changes.

This brings us to the second part of the human connection. We need to locate our cause on the map of human concerns so that it can be perceived and understood as relevant to other social and ethical causes. It has already been done on paper, but the movement as such does not follow through with the action behind its rhetoric. Singer’s case for animal liberation begins with the position that discrimination based on race or gender is immoral and goes on to state that “speciesism”, a related form of discrimination, is likewise immoral. One would expect that every animal rights/liberation advocate would then necessarily embrace this basic position. To be sure, many animal activists oppose racism and sexism, but more, it seems, out of coincidence than from animal liberation convictions. Sadly, I keep coming across advocates of animal rights who either ignore or verbally attack the messages of (what should be) our companion movements against racism, sexism and other forms of discrimination among our own species. This strikes me as worse than a lapse in adhering to animal liberation principles. It is misanthropy and misogyny, that is, forms of speciesism—the very prejudice we claim to oppose. Moreover, since we are a political movement (if we are not, then what are we doing?), we ought to know better than to antagonize parallel, perhaps potentially supportive movements. If our moral principles against prejudicial attitudes and practices really mean anything to us, should we not have the personal conviction to act politically to further those principles? And if we as individuals do that, should not our movement as a whole follow through with political action? Without such commitment, we will be not only hypocrites but failures.

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The idea of extending our movement has been all too quietly discussed among animal rights/liberation advocates over the past few years. A friend wrote recently urging me to remind others that “the struggle for animal rights is a revolutionary movement aimed not merely at gaining protection for other creatures, but at a basic restructuring of institutions in our society.” Now this may sound too daring, too upsetting and too subversive for some people among the ranks of our movement. But then these people should not profess to want to bring an end to abuse and exploitation of animals. They should continue to function as most churches do, collecting money from the guilty, preaching platitudes and carrying on programs that are more palliative than curative.

Our movement must take stock of the cultural milieu in which we work. We are immersed in cultural attitudes and habits formed during several thousand years of a human economy based on the subjugation and exploitation of animals. We began this process some 10,000 years ago when we first brought animals under our dominion and control — ostensibly for our own benefit. In doing so, we invented oppression. We soon learned to apply the new invention to less powerful members of our own species — women, children or “outsiders” — and slavery was born. In her important book, 

"Woman's Creation (Garden City, New Jersey: Anchor Press, 1979) feminist writer Elizabeth Fisher traces the archaeological evidence that shows how early animal-keeping societies (our cultural ancestors) gradually began to treat women like another kind of livestock, as instruments to be controlled or sacrificed. She documents how dramatic changes in these societies' perspectives on nature and sex roles are associated with war, slavery, prostitution and class oppression. Although the whole book is must reading, a few words from Fisher communicate just how relevant her findings are to our movement:

"...The continuum between animals and people is felt by many. Small wonder then that the keeping and raising of animals had wide-ranging effects on the customs, art, and psyche of human society.

"...Now humans violated animals by making them their slaves. In taking them in and feeding them, humans first made friends with animals and then killed them. To do so, they had to kill some sensitivity in themselves. When they began manipulating the reproduction of animals, they were even more personally involved in practices which led to cruelty, guilt and subsequent numbness. The keeping of animals would seem to have set a model for the enslavement of humans, in particular the large-scale exploitation of women captives for breeding and labor, which is a salient feature of the developing civilizations.”

Other feminist writers see the connection between animal exploitation and human oppression, and more than a few advocate ethical vegetarianism along with feminism. In her book, The Violent Sex (Guernerville, California: Bluestocking Books, 1978) Laurel Holliday writes:

"Peter Singer has presented the case [for vegetarianism] with the utmost philosophical clarity... My purpose here is not to recruit vegetarians so much as to make the point once again that the root of the problem is in our blithely taking power over the lives and deaths of other creatures whose suf-

ferring is in no way necessary for our survival. If we so easily take the lives of animals who are only a few evolutionary steps removed from us, what is to prevent us from doing the same to humans who are physically very different from us — of a different color, or speaking an unintelligible language, or “primitive” in their customs?” (emphasis in original)

In the introduction to their excellent vegetarian cookbook, The Political Palate (Bridgeport, Connecticut: Sanguinaria Publishing, 1980) the women of The Bloodroot Collective explain the reasons for their diet:

“Our food is vegetarian because we are feminists. We are opposed to the exploitation, domination, and destruction which come from factory-farming and the hunter with the gun. We oppose the keeping and killing of animals for the pleasure of the palate just as we oppose men controlling abortion or sterilization. We won't be part of the torture and killing of animals.”

In their search to understand the roots of their own oppression, these feminists see the significant relationship between animal subjugation and human social relations — a relationship that our movement would do well to better illuminate. They note well how once animal subjugation, exploitation and the hatreds that go with them come to be legitimized in a culture they can be directed elsewhere. Indeed, the severest degrees of hatred and oppression of Blacks, Jews, Orientals and other “races” are still rationalized on the grounds that these humans are “just animals” and not entitled to moral consideration.

Although I have not yet made an exhaustive study, I believe that there is evidence that hatred, debasement and the other attitudes that made subjugation of animals emotionally comfortable to humans are interwoven among the historical roots of racism and misogyny. Ancient attitudes toward apes, for example, offer a revealing index to our attitudes about our own species in relation to other animals. Because the ape so resembled humans, it was the object of much neurotic hostility. To the Greeks and Romans, the ape was turpissima bestia (most vile beast), a hideous pretender to human status. In the early Christian era, the pejorative epithet “ape” was applied to all enemies of Christ and the ape became a figura diabola (representation of the devil) in art and literature. By the Middle Ages, apes symbolized humans in a state of degeneracy: laughable, contemptible and a reminder that we neglect “the spiritual aspect of our nature and unreasoningly abandon ourselves to the sins of the flesh; in short, if we let our animal impulses get the better of us, then we sink to the level of ape...” (H.W. Janson, Apes and Ape Lore in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, London University Press, 1952). It took little thinking to extend this perspective to human differences, and sure enough, apes in art of the period are associated with Eve, the “fall of man,” the victory of sensuality over Christian discipline, and feminine qualities in general “Bestial,” “oversexed” apes represented the “wantonness” and perhaps the “natural inferiority” of women.

Possessing this cultural outlook, Europeans of the 16th century were introduced to the anthropoid apes and to West African peoples at the same time and in the same place. As Winthrop D. Jordan states in his classic study on the historical origins of racism in the United States, The White Man’s Burden (Oxford University Press, 1974):
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Euthanasia of Day-Old Male Chicks in the Poultry Industry

Walter Jaksch

Humane killing of animals implies a painless death (euthanasia). This depends on the rapidity with which unconsciousness is achieved and the maintenance of this state until death occurs. Euthanasia methods for day-old chicks must also be economical and should not interfere with the use of the carcasses for animal food or fertilizer. Manual decapitation or dislocation of the neck are the best available manual methods of euthanasia. For larger numbers of birds, the literature recommends homogenization in a crushe. In the author's own experiments, the destruction of day-old chicks was most effectively carried out by poisoning with carbon dioxide (CO₂). A simple gas chamber was constructed, which is now commercially available, into which boxes of chicks were placed. The chamber has the capability to euthanize approximately 8,000 chicks within 2-3 hours at minimal cost.

Introduction

With the development of modern hybrid breeds, the poultry industry has produced flocks with distinctive genetic performances. The laying flocks, bred for maximum productivity, utilize all their energy for producing eggs, with a minimal amount of weight gain. The males of the laying flocks, with the exception of those few used to fertilize the hen, are of little use. Because of their genetic make-up, it is economically unfeasible to fatten them up for meat production. As a result, millions of newly hatched male chicks are destroyed each year.

Although most industrialized countries have regulations for the slaughter of livestock, these concern mainly food animals, and as such govern the techniques of stunning and bleeding, and ensure hygienic preparation of the meat. Since there is no consumption of the day-old chickens and thus no public health consideration, little attention has been given to this procedure. In fact, there are no known regulations which exist specifically for the euthanasia of these birds.

The first scientific report in the German literature on the methods of euthanizing male chicks did not appear until 1969, when Gerriets (1969) investigated euthanasia by gas poisoning and manual techniques. Poisoning with carbon dioxide and nitrogen, homogenization in a crushe, and manual blows are at present considered the most effective and efficient methods.

All other publications on the euthanasia of poultry up to 1973 dealt only with the adult fowl or single birds. In 1973, Mitterlehner and Jaksch presented a preliminary report of their research on the euthanasia of day-old male chicks. This was followed by their publication of reports on the development of mass euthanasia of chicks by carbon dioxide poisoning (Jaksch and Mitterlehner, 1979). Hilbrich (1976, 1977) also published the results of experiments using crushers, and in 1976, mention of the problem was first made in a textbook (Sieghmann, 1976). This paper will discuss and evaluate the various methods used for mass euthanasia of male chicks with regard to the existing literature and the author's own research.

Dr. Jaksch is Professor of veterinary medicine at the University of Vienna. Medical Clinic for Hooved Animals, Small Animals and Poultry, Linke Bahngasse 11, A-1030 Vienna, Austria.