

the major causes, it seems, were protracted peace and material prosperity.

Peace we thought was at hand when, to everyone's relief, the cold war came to an apparent end and (or so it was thought) we entered a "new world order." And prosperity? Well, once the need to arm ourselves to the teeth evaporated, the money left over, the much ballyhooed "peace dividend," could be used to educate the young, house the poor, tend the elderly, and generally to share an abundant material prosperity to more and more people.

Times change. Even as I write this, the United States and Iraq remain at war, and the "peace dividend" has found its way into arming and supporting upwards of 500,000 combat-ready soldiers. So much for the "peace dividend." And so much for helping others prosper materially. The plain fact is, the poor are getting poorer, those who need housing most are getting less, the elderly are being warehoused in institutions of despair, and so on. If, then, Ryder is right in believing that peace and prosperity are needed if animal protection efforts are to meet with success, the present looks more like the worst than the best of times for the animals.

This should hardly be surprising. Making the world better for nonhuman animals is not something that can be achieved independently of making the world better for human beings. The slogan, "Animal liberation is human liberation," is more than a slogan. Genuine advances in the justice and quality of life made available to the one are inseparable from similar advances made for the other. Things do change in the sense that the identities of the victims of injustice, whether human or otherwise, differ over time; but so long as injustice rules, whether the victims are humans or other animals, things stay the same.

This is why animal advocates who restrict their time and energy to animal liberation might pause to ask, not whether our brothers and sisters in fur and feathers and fins deserve justice (for they do) but whether they have any realistic chance of obtaining it if we are blind to the injustice suffered by our brothers and sisters in human form. This is not to say that we should abandon the other animals and give all our time and energy to righting human injustices. This is not to say that at all. It is only to say that we need to consider the promise and power of a more complete activism. If there is one point in Ryder's book about animal advocates of the past that is of particular relevance to animal advocates of the present, this is it.

Response to Regan: Sentientism

Richard D. Ryder

I am flattered by Tom Regan's very kind and interesting review of my book *Animal Revolution: Changing Attitudes Towards Speciesism*, not least because of his own unparalleled contribution to the cause. I hope my work is more than just a history of the animal movement; I have tried to introduce some new psychological, philosophical, and political ideas on the way.

Regan draws attention to my view that Darwinism did not contribute much to the nineteenth century animal campaigns. One reason for this was that animal welfare had already become, by the 1860's, a part of the British orthodox establishment. Darwin was, in effect, firmly kidnapped by scientific provivisectors like Huxley who challenged that orthodoxy. In consequence animal welfarists saw Darwin as their enemy rather than friend.

It was this paradox that struck me as an undergraduate at Cambridge in the early 1960's. Why was it that the scientists who happily experimented on animals were the same people who based their philosophies upon Darwinian evolution? Experimentation seemed to me to have become the blood ritual of an alternative and cannibalistic religion; it preached kinship and yet urged the ruthless exploitation of kin. This apparent inconsistency rankled inside me until my indignation erupted in newspaper letters written in Oxford in 1969 in which I spelt out what I considered to be the moral implications of Darwin's message. Ironically, after some years of campaigning on this Darwinian basis, I now consider that morality is better based upon sentience than upon evolutionary kinship. Hence my promotion of what I call sentientism—the moral primacy of the individual's capacity to feel pain or distress regardless as to whether these states are experienced by a human, a rat, an alien,



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or a machine. I consider that sentient machines should be included within the moral circle (if ever they are invented) despite their lack of kinship with us.

I think Tom Regan has slightly simplified my position on the question of "rights." It is true that I was wary of using the word because I felt it was "synthetic." But I meant by this only that "rights" was an artificial or human-made construct. Yet, despite this, people seemed to be using the word (in the context of the human rights campaigns of the 1960's) as if rights had an objective existence, defined by law or in some other concrete way. This is one reason why, in my earlier writings, I invented the word "speciesism" (as a parallel to sexism and racism) and referred to interests instead of rights. I do, however, as Regan points out, honour the spirit of the rights position because I reject the utilitarians' aggregating of pains and pleasures across individuals. There is a mysterious but deeply important boundary between individuals through which consciousness (sentience) itself cannot penetrate. I may sympathise or empathise with your pain but I can never feel that same pain as you feel it. If I stand outside the system then I can, in a sense, aggregate the pains and pleasures of others but, unless the aggregator can actually *feel* all those pains and pleasures, then the aggregation has little meaning. In a fascinating way, consciousness is anchored in the individual and is nontransferable. Although I find it hard to prove why, I consider that such nontransferability must invalidate aggregation. Trade-offs of pains and pleasures are alright *within* a sentient individual but are out of order *between* individuals. This is why I prefer the rights position to the utilitarian position (which allows, for example, the torturing to death of a child if the sum total of the pleasures of its sadistic torturers is greater than the child's agony). However, what I *like* about the utilitarians is that they focus on pain and pleasure (happiness) as the basis for morality and not other, vaguer, criteria. As a psychologist I have found that the answer to the questions "what is good about liberty or justice or equality etc.?" is always, ultimately, the same—"because I think these things (justice, equality, etc.) will make me happy."

In other words, I believe criteria such as liberty or justice, or Regan's "inherent value," are secondary to the primary criterion of pain/pleasure (happiness).

I may say that I recognize the presumptuousness of my posture in trying to bring together the pain/pleasure emphasis of Singer with the rights position of Regan. It is impertinent of me to attempt to straddle this divide. I will, no doubt, receive my just deserts if I fall into the abyss to be duly ground to dust between the two

philosophical colossi! Anyway, I have tossed this idea of sentience into the debate.

As Regan rightly points out, from a *practical* point of view we will be better advised to speak many tongues. I have found this particularly true as a political campaigner and publicist for animal welfare/rights/liberation. Older and more conservative people in Britain, for example, respond better to talk of animal welfare and appeals to their sense of *duty* or *responsibility*. Younger and more radical people prefer to talk of *rights*. I have suggested in *Animal Revolution* that one reason for this is that those who feel they have no power identify with victims whereas those who feel powerful do so less.

In the interface between environmentalists (who sometimes glibly talk of the rights of trees and mountains as if they were sentient and without really analyzing the usually anthropocentric basis of their ethic) and animal rightists, language flexibility is particularly useful. In practical terms environmentalism usually coincides with animal welfare in its aims and, even if many key environmentalists argue from an anthropocentric point of view, some others are really animal rightists in disguise. It is this latter group which becomes indignant when it discovers, for example, that their environmental association is advocating killing animals in order to preserve plant species. Environmentalism and sentience can be reconciled by arguing that trees and rocks must be preserved because their destruction means pain for many sentients—those who depend upon these trees and rocks as habitats as well as for those humans who suffer aesthetically by their loss or disfigurement.

Finally, Regan is right to emphasize the link between human and nonhuman welfare. Not only are they philosophically one, but each tends to encourage the other. If my theory is right, it is only when humans enjoy peace and prosperity that there are widespread advances in the treatment of nonhumans. The current recession in Britain has coincided with apparent increases in certain forms of animal cruelty and a decrease, albeit slight, in the public enthusiasm for green issues generally. One must add, and this is an optimistic note, that this decline in interest also coincides with three huge human disasters—the plight of the Kurds, the Ethiopians, and the Bangladeshis which have recently preoccupied the British media and public. But during the Gulf War itself members of Parliament still continued to receive more letters about animal welfare than any other topic—including the war. We first put animals into politics in Britain for the 1979 election, and we are currently aiming to do it again for the next one.