BETWEEN THE SPECIES

Review of
The Moral Rights of Animals
ed. Mylan Engel Jr. and Gary Lynn Comstock
Lexington, 2016.

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This volume is a collection of 13 original essays celebrating Tom Regan’s enormously influential work on animal rights. This anthology results from a conference at Regan’s home university, North Carolina State University, in April 2011. After an Introduction and very helpful Overview, the 14 essays are divided into three sections.


There is a very brief, but poignant Epilogue by Jeff McManahan that I highly recommend.

Without exception, the essays are very accessible; I would think that any upper-level undergraduate would have no trouble understanding any essay. Regan’s opening essay suffices for providing the gist of his view, and many of the essays can be conceived as further articulations and criticisms of some of the implications of Regan’s ‘rights view’.

Perhaps the most advanced essays are those of Nobis, Baril, and Gardner, with Engel’s essay providing the most detailed elucidation of Regan’s view. Norcross’s essay attempts to combine the best of Peter Singer—most of whose work on animals came from a preference utilitarian standpoint—and Regan, who has a self-avowed anti-utilitarian, deontological perspective. Ilea’s essay is another that attempts a marriage of sorts, but this time one that incorporates Regan’s ‘rights view’ with Martha Nussbaum’s ‘capability approach’.

This volume deserves a wide audience. For those who have ever reflected on the ethics of food and eating, questioning whether they are acting morally when feasting on the carcasses of killed animals, this book may help you decide. For those who ever wondered about the ethics of predation, musing how someone who advocated for rights for nonhuman animals can supply principled responses to our responsibilities regarding animals harming and killing other animals, this book is for you. For those who have seriously thought about the morality of either sustenance or recreational (‘sport’) hunting, this book is for you. And, finally, for those who believe that philosophical work lacks practical significance, but who are open to being convinced otherwise, I heartily recommend these thoughtful
essays spawned by the work and life of a most intellectually honest and compassionate man.