CALL FOR PAPERS
SOCIETY FOR THE STUDY OF
ETHICS AND ANIMALS
Pacific Division Meeting
San Francisco, California
March 26, 1987

According to Peter Singer:

It is not arbitrary to hold that the life of a self-aware being, capable of abstract thought, of planning for the future, of complex acts of communication, and so on, is more valuable than the life of a being without these capacities. (Animal Liberation, pp. 21-22)

According to Tom Regan:

One cannot suppose that moral agents [or patients] have varying degrees of inherent value depending on the extent to which they possess some favored virtues. Inherent value is a categorical concept. One either has it, or one does not. There are no in-betweens. Moreover, all those who have it, have it equally. (The Case for Animal Rights, pp. 246-7)

Papers on the topic of assessing the value of moral agents and patients are welcome for this program. (Papers need not be concerned with the work of Singer or Regan; the above quotations are offered only as ostensive clarifications of the topic of this call for papers.)

Those interested in contributing papers or in serving as commentators for this program should contact Steve Sapontzis at their earliest convenience:

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also in the Greek elements of our cultural inheritance. So, the comradely hand of welcome must be extended. We are not involved with old feuds about separation of Church and State but with getting the votes and strength of public opinion to end present outrages. Anyway, probably many of us who are not overtly religious have remaining religious nooks and crannies in our natures.

DARE SPECIES BE REVERED?

RELIGION AND ANIMAL RIGHTS:
A WELCOME

& CONCERNING RESERVATIONS

Reservations about the ultimate outcome of the involvement of religions in the animal movement remain, however, appropriate. The writer of the letter in Agenda states one reservation, saying that religions are bound up with a supreme being whose main goal is domination. Let us here limit this charge to a complaint about religions of the West. Can it be denied that the assertion is true of a God insisting that there be no other gods before Him? The critique elaborated by Marcuse, Hillman, Merchant, Leiss, and others, including in part Illich, of monotheism and its linked principles of hierarchy and patriarchy has been telling. We should no more give up the gains brought by this critique than give up those brought by the women's movement. In all of this, however, the baby may have been thrown out with the bath water. To this reader, such is the sense of the discussion of religion in America in Robert Bellah and co-authors' Habits of the Heart. In brief, it is these authors' claim that certain privatizations of the self and its feeling condition have become the only presently operative criteria of the good and that these criteria are inadequate and insufficient to handle questions of ethics, because moral and civil order are dependent on public dimensions of discourse that are unknown and inaccessible to the modern individualistic self and which can be sustained only by what the authors call "communities of memory" (one such, cultivated in this journal, is the long tradition of ethical thought). Among such communities are ethic-cultural groups and those groups whose frame of reference is one of the religious traditions. But even the religious, say the authors, have widely become part of a culture in which the individual's feelings have priority, so that for many of the "religious," the traditions are not in practice available for dealing effectively with questions beyond the limits of the self. Regaining these prerequisites of morality, including compassionate imperatives in relation to animals, may require that we take back part of what our culture has attempted to abandon, namely, those aspects of religious tradition which perhaps cannot meet any humanistic test of validity by reference to whether or not they help us to feel better about ourselves.

Society and science now have inherited the spirit of exclusivity from religious monotheism as such. It is secular and scientific society now, more than religion, which maintains the structure of exploitation against which the animal movement is directed. Yet, it may indeed be the case nevertheless that the anti-animal presuppositions at least of the Hebrew and Christian traditions go far too deep to encourage trust that pro-animal change within the religions will be lasting. Saint Francis is a rare voice in Christianity, and even he is not invulnerable to all criticism on humane grounds. Aquinas' contention that animals have no souls is more typical. It is a view which no Pope or Church conclave has ever contravened. Therefore, when our purpose in the animal movement comes up against divine will, where will the loyalties of the religious come to rest, on the side of God or of life? This is a real question, it seems to me, but not one that counsels an unwelcoming response to the new pro-animal ferment among the religious. Instead, the question is one of those from which a conversation might develop with the religious about just such matters. For it is always at least possible that a Pope or Church conclave will take the step of doing their part toward ending the schism between human and animal, just as there have been recent hints in the practice of Pope Jean Paul II of an end to the schism between Christian and Jew. I will return to this discussion in the fall issue of Bios.