POLITICAL ANIMALS:
A Study of the Emerging Animal Rights Movement in the United States

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I. Introduction

Every great movement must experience three stages: ridicule, discussion, and adoption.

--John Stuart Mill

Animals are entering the political realm from all angles: the philosophical, religious, legislative, and metaphysical. The cage door has been sprung, and we must confront other beings and questions in alternative ways. The animal in politics, however, is not just literal but figurative as well, since it requires us to reassess our theories, habits, institutions, and practices to
accommodate other beings, if necessary. Humans are thrust once again into the moral courtroom and given the task of exculpating themselves and their institutions of a crime of commission, malum in se, a form of exploitation which, for persons in the animal rights movement, is so heinous that it begs comparison with slavery and the holocaust.

More specifically, the presence of animals in theory and practice allows one to speak of the models of political and philosophical understanding: an analogical model and a conscientious model (or politics of conscience). A politics of conscience, as persons like Thoreau and Gandhi exemplified, posits a third ear, an inner voice, which shows a sensitivity to political and moral nuances in a way that a politics of interest, for example, does not. This element is especially evident in the ideological underpinnings of the animal rights movement. There is a very high level of commitment among activists that usually spills into other political areas. Organizations are predominantly voluntary, non-profit, and other-regarding entities.

Activists, in fact, often carry their level of concern far beyond the realm of duty or obligation. In some cases, this outlook is so encompassing that it causes a kind of political illness. For example, Sally Gearhart, a California activist, speaks of having "animal pain attacks" at the supermarket meat counter which make her double over.[1] The view of Ingrid Newkirk, Director of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, also epitomizes the degree of conscientiousness which prevails in the movement. In an article in The Washington Post entitled "She's a Portrait of Zealotry in Plastic Shoes" (November 13, 1983: B10), Newkirk relates:

There's an old ethical problem . .
. If you were starving to death in the desert and you came across a rabbit who was healthy and wild and at home in his natural habitat, should you try to kill it and eat it? I think what I should do is sit down and evaluate the rabbit's life and my life and make my decision on the basis of which of our two lives were liable to cause the least harm and do the most good.

Thus, among the politics of interest with which change in the public realm is usually associated, there lies a deeper, more ideological component to the animal rights movement which may, along with causes of a similar nature, prefigure a return to a more operative, Aristotelian conception of the political realm.

Coupled with this model, the animal rights movement also allows one to speak in terms of an analogical understanding of politics. That is, it shows that certain kinds of treatment, rights, and fundamental notions such as respect are applicable at different levels and in different ways, rather than turning politics into an all-or-nothing game between species. Animals in philosophy may be thought of in this manner as well, for we can only understand them after we have comprehended our own nature and only then through analogy. In his Treatise of Human Nature, David Hume seems to have understood this point, for he remarks that "Tis from the resemblance of the external actions of those we ourselves perform, that we judge their [animals] internal likewise to resemble ours" and concludes that "no truth appears to me more evident, than that beasts are endow'd with thought and reason as well as man."[2] Thoreau is again relevant, because he makes analogy into a kind of methodology. "All perception of truth," he remarks, "is the detection of an analogy: we reason from our hands to our head."[3]

Combining these two understandings, it may be said that the animal rights movement has detected a conscientious analogy. The activists have reasoned from their heart to their hands and then to their head. They are now trying to reason to the heads of other persons who may not perceive an analogy between their actions toward humans and their actions toward animals or who are perhaps still trapped in a politics of interest management. This kind of conscientious analogy may also be what is operative in the extension of benevolence and justice to persons outside the traditional circle of moral concern which usually does not extend beyond the family and community.

The animal rights movement then reveals that while humans, as Aristotle asserts, are political animals by nature, animals are political beings by convention. It is this realm which pits the natural political animal against the conventional one to which we must
now turn to consider the structure and goals of animal rights groups.

II. Organizational Characteristics

In terms of a three-fold typology of socio-political goods like the one developed by Peter Clark and James A. Wilson, it seems that members of animal rights ("AR") organizations do receive certain goods, which, broadly defined, include the fulfillment of goals and the acquiring of benefits. These goods, in turn, are generally related to the incentives which motivate individuals within the movement. The first category of goods and incentives, the material or those with monetary value, is notably absent from the AR movement. Individuals and organizations as a whole seldom receive such goods, and thus persons seldom join organizations because of material incentives. In fact, it may be more precise to say that individuals must often sacrifice a great amount of material goods in order to further the goals of the movement. In this sense, there are material disincentives to joining an AR organization. One possible exception to this rule could be the larger and wealthier humane organizations, which frequently pay respectable salaries to their officers.

Rather, individuals in AR organizations appear to receive, and in some cases to be motivated by, solidary and purposive benefits. Solidary benefits "derive in the main from the act of associating and include such rewards as socializing, congeniality, the sense of group membership, fun and conviviality, the maintenance of social distinctions, and so on."[4] These benefits seem to be most manifest during AR rallies, protests, conferences, and organizational meetings, but they tend to be independent of or incidental to the ends of the organization. The solidary benefits of the AR groups are also collective rather than selective, because they are not amenable to a discriminating distribution.

Purposive benefits are like solidary ones in that a monetary value cannot be placed upon them, but they are like material ones because they are external to the actual activity of the members and the organization. They are derived from the objectives of the organization. Purposive benefits include such goods as a just government, freedom, peace, or in the case of animal rights and welfare organizations, the alleviation and elimination of unnecessary suffering.

Animal rights groups may be classified as purposive organizations, because they work "explicitly for the benefit of some larger public" (non-human animals) rather than working "chiefly for the benefit of its members."[5] Three different purposes and three kinds of organizations relying on these respective purposes can be distinguished as goal-oriented, ideological, and redemptive. Goal-oriented organizations have a single, established purpose or set of purposes. Ideological organizations are those groups with a comprehensive outlook on society that espouse a systematic critique and plan for change. Redemptive organizations attempt to change the lives of their members in addition to, and in a way consistent with, the changes they advocate for a society.[6]

As an ideal type, AR groups can be considered goal-oriented organizations with either single, specific purposes, as in the case of anti-vivisection societies, or with a set of related purposes, such as banning hunting, increasing the number of meatless alternatives at restaurants, and securing more effective animal welfare laws. However, practically, some AR groups are based to a large degree on ideological and redemptive elements, and most of them contain at least a small amount of these factors. AR groups which promote an alternative way of life, and are grounded on a certain religion or based on a principle such as Ahimsa (harmlessness and compassion) or the sanctity of life, often contain these ideological and redemptive underpinnings. Examples of such organizations include the American Vegan Society, Christians Helping Animals and People, and Beauty Without Cruelty (BWC). These kinds of organizations derive their goals in large part from fundamental beliefs and ideals about the nature of humanity and society, and they usually expect a commitment to these ideals from their members.

Most of the goal-oriented AR organizations also exhibit a certain degree of these factors. In fact, it is plausible to argue that organizations based solely on goal-oriented incentives and benefits, with no material rewards, must contain an ideological or redemptive element at some level in order to survive. This idea is verified among the AR groups, for most of the individuals in-
volved share a broad concern for humanity as well as the environment, appear to be very ideological and committed, tend to associate with the political left, and exemplify in their lives and diet the kind of changes which the organizations proffer. Thus, it is accurate to say that while the AR groups are goal-oriented, the individuals within the groups possess attributes of all three positive classifications.

AR groups must also be classified and understood in terms of their size and resources. The size of AR organizations varies from the very small, student groups with about ten members, to large, well-financed anti-vivisection societies with as many as ten thousand supporters. Generally, as the size of AR groups increases, there is a corresponding increase in their sphere of influence. Organizations with less than 100 activists tend to confine their activities to the communities or campuses to which they belong. Examples of this category include the University of Chicago Animal Welfare Group and the Animal Rights Network of Chicago.

Groups with 100 to 150 members are usually more regional organizations or have a professional and specialized composition, such as psychologists or veterinarians, who attempt to influence change within either a given intellectual or geographical community. Californians for Responsible Research (now defunct) and the Association of Veterinarians for Animal Rights are example groups. Finally, organizations with more than 500 members are generally national in character with either multiple concerns, like People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) and the International Society for Animal Rights, or a well-established influence and expertise in one particular area of the movement, such as the American Anti-Vivisection Society.

The amount of resources an organization possesses and the kind of funding it receives are closely related to its size, influences, and prestige within the movement. National organizations receive their funds primarily through four sources: membership dues and subscriptions to their publications, bequests, large donations, and smaller donations. The prototypical national organization in terms of funding is the International Society for Animal Rights (ISAR), which in 1982 had an income of $235,864 and a net worth of $387,229 maintained by a combination of all the above sources. When the will of George Whittel, financier and animal welfare supporter, was settled in the early 1970's, ISAR (then and until 1983 called "Society for Animal Rights") received $76,000 of the ten million he had bequeathed to a local SPCA which did not exist. This money enabled the group to move from New York to its present location in Clark's Summit, Pennsylvania. Other large AR organizations have incomes which range from several thousand dollars a year to well above $50,000 a year, such as PETA, BWC, and Animal Liberation. For example, PETA's income for the fiscal year ending July 31, 1985, was $789,767.

The income of these organizations, which may accurately be called "animal rights" groups because of their more radical goals and strategies, stand in sharp juxtaposition with the much higher incomes of the very large groups which are either strictly "animal welfare" organizations or have elements of both of the ideal types of organizations—rights and welfare—but which are fully characteristic of neither. The large, well-established humane societies are especially affluent. New York's American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) has annual revenues in excess of six and one-half million dollars; the Animal Rescue League of Boston (ARL) receives as much as $800,000 a year in private contributions; and the richest animal welfare organization, the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (MSPCA), has a net worth of over fifty million. While this funding comes from a variety of sources, a great percentage is the result of very large donations, bequests, and investments.[7]

Ironically, the success of the humane societies and welfare organizations in raising funds is a source of great tension within the movement as a whole. The smaller, rights groups not only disapprove of the more moderate stances of these organizations but also frequently point out their financial and
ideological conflicts of interest. The ASPCA and MSPCA have been occasionally subject to such criticism. In the 1970s, members of the ASPCA initiated a lawsuit against their own organization for "extreme indifference and neglect" of animals and mismanagement of resources that resulted in the waste of public funds. Among the accusations brought against the Society by actress Gretchen Wyler was the charge that the head of the organization, who then had a $40,000 salary, was availing himself of such gratuities as a chauffeur-driven car, non-itemized dining and grooming bills, and membership in private clubs.[9]

Many humane societies also engage in investment practices which are unconscionable to a large part of the AR movement. MSPCA and ARL, for example, pride themselves as powerful animal protection organizations and have opposed the Draize test, but they both have substantial investments in cosmetics and pharmaceutical companies like Johnson and Johnson, which perform a large number of painful tests on animals each year. MSPCA is a particularly suspect organization, because it owns a great amount of stock in Dow Chemical Co., which supports a major lobby group for animal research, the National Society for Biomedical Research.

Several board members of humane societies have also been accused of conflicts of interest because they serve on boards of institutions which use live animals for experiments. In 1976, a civil suit was filed against the Animal Protection Institute (API) in Sacramento, California, charging that over $100,000 in donations had been wrongfully appropriated by the organization and that more than $800,000 of its $900,000 revenues was spent on salaries, administration, and fund-raising. API was not, according to the claims, rendering any meaningful service to animal welfare.[10] The cumulative effect of these charges and practices seems to have precipitated a minor credibility crisis among welfare organizations and to have exacerbated the differences between AR groups on the one hand and animal welfare groups on the other. George Cave, President of Trans-Species Unlimited (TSU), an active voice among AR organizations, puts the matter succinctly:

large organizations putting money which should go to saving animals into, $78,000 a year salaries, plush offices, and glossy publications . . . is obscene.[11]

The funds of regional and medium-sized organizations with 100 to 150 supporters generally represent a distillate from five potential sources: small donations, membership fees, fund-raising activity, grants from wealthier organizations, and the personal savings of the organization leaders and members. Like many large groups, these organizations often have a number of financial supporters who can be relied upon in times of need and a system for communicating with them. The Animal Liberation Front (ALF), a very radical, direct action group in England has even established a formal organization upon which it depends, in part, for its finances. Founded in 1983, the ALF Supporters Group has 1100 members from ages sixteen to seventy. The annual income of these mid-sized groups is often erratic and dependent on numerical size, but it generally ranges from several hundred dollars to a few thousand dollars.

The small organizations must often devote a considerable amount of time to securing funds which come from a variety of sources: small donations, membership dues, fund-raisers, and personal savings. Frequently, the group must resort to selling baked goods, animal cards, T-shirts, and buttons. Increasingly, both small and large organizations are selling books about animal rights issues and vegetarian diets and distributing films about animal exploitation. These activities serve two important functions simultaneously: raising money and informing the public. Some of the smaller organizations rely financially on larger organizations like the Fund for Animals, PETA, Mobilization for Animals, and, occasionally, the humane societies, the Humane Society of the U.S., in particular.

Such funding activity between AR organizations has strengthened the movement thus far, but it could be a source of difficulty if the smaller groups become too dependent on the larger ones. The University of Chicago Animal Welfare Group, for example, has complained that one of its funders, Mobilization for Animals, is "too dictatorial." In addition to this potential problem, is the general need for funds within the movement that has resulted in a "constant sparring" between groups, according to the leader of one organ-
Commenting on this situation, the Student Action Corps for Animals notes, "Sometimes it seems like there is a race—who will win the phantom funder's heart and who will create the perception of being 'The Hero of the Day.'"[13]

According to Stephen Kellert's 1976 study of the financial contributors to animal welfare causes, twenty-five percent of the U.S. population reported contributing a small amount of money to animal welfare, six percent indicated contributions of a moderate sum, while only one-half of one percent of the study group gave a large amount of money. As could be expected, contributors are generally persons of a higher socio-economic status, white, and from cities with more than a million residents. Contributions are also more likely to be the result of attachment to companion animals than a concern for wildlife. Four and one-half percent of Kellert's sample group reported membership in at least one animal welfare organization.[14]

These findings are extremely relevant for the animal rights movement but are most reflective of membership in and support of SPCA's and welfare organizations. The groups in the rights movement were inchoate or in their formative stages at the time of the study. Nevertheless, it is reasonable to believe that the results for the AR movement would not deviate dramatically from those of animal welfare.

III. Composition of Animal Rights Groups

Based on the results of my survey and study conducted on over twenty-five major AR organizations, the following conclusions can be drawn about the composition (member) of the movement.

First, the movement is composed predominantly of women. Of the seventeen organizations providing information on the percentage of male and female members in their groups, only the International League for Animal Rights, with forty members, had more than fifty percent men. Most of the organizations are sixty to seventy-five percent female, and the movement as a whole is about seventy percent female. The composition of the leadership positions within the organizations is much more evenly distributed between the sexes, however. Many of the organizations, in fact, report a breakdown of fifty percent male and fifty percent female among organizational leaders.

A constellation of reasons helps to explain the predominance of women within AR organizations. Historically, women have been the most active sex in the humane movement. Originally barred from the leadership positions of many SPCA's, they subsequently began to organize their own societies, chapters, and leagues for preventing cruelty to animals in Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, and North Carolina. It was not until the 1870's, however, that women would be admitted into the official leadership positions of organizations, even though they composed a majority of the members. Except for the work of men like George Angell, women then dominated the field of humane education once they were fully admitted.

In addition, it seems that women have had fewer social barriers to overcome in terms of their relationship with other beings. Correspondingly, it has been easier for women to show emotion toward and sympathy with the plight of animals. To the Victorian mind, for example, women were free from the "beastial desires" of sex, and this freedom from "animality" made them suitable for the movement to protect animals. Many women, in fact, lived up to this image of the gentler sex with an aptitude for civilizing endeavors. Remarked one contemporary woman:

If my sex has a "mission" of any kind it is surely to soften this hard old world. . . . On a question of mercy a woman is likely to have a truer, sounder judgment qua woman, than a man.[15]

The structure of AR organizations and the nature of the movement also lend themselves to participation by those individuals who do not have access to the traditional positions of political power. AR groups have voluntary, non-remunerative positions which are attractive to women in many occupations and to mothers. Finally, the issue of animal liberation and welfare is linked both philosophically and historically with feminism or women's liberation. Mary Wollenstonecraft, author in 1792 of the influential work, Vindication of the Rights of Women, published stories which encouraged kindness to animals, and famous American feminists, including Susan B. Anthony and Lucy Stone, were in-
volved in early vegetarian crusades.

Currently, many women who once confined their activities to fighting sexism are becoming involved with animal rights issues because they perceive the links between exploitation of women and similar mistreatment of animals by society. One of the peace camps in Great Britain, Women's Camp for Peace and Animal Liberation, combines the issues in its protests. Other women call attention to sexism within the AR movement. Notes Sally Gearhart, author of a collection of feminist writings:

Here we have a movement the backbone of which, most people would admit, has been women. But then, it's the energy of women in the church that has run that patriarchal institution, too. It does seem ironic to me that in a movement where women do so much of the work, that we have mainly men in the leadership positions.[16]

Blacks and minorities are notably absent in the movement. Only one organization, Animalines, reported more than ten percent participation by minorities. This fact is probably understandable in sociological terms, since minorities are not generally involved in causes of this nature, due to factors like their level of income or education and social status, but the reasons for this lack of participation are less apparent when the similarities between the exploitation of minorities—blacks in particular—and the mistreatment of animals are underscored.

Historically and philosophically, there have been many parallels between the status of the two groups. Throughout the eighteenth century, for example, American writers tended to associate apes and Africans, and many theorists saw blacks as evolutionary links between anthropoid apes and humans.[17] Perhaps this association in the popular mind and subsequent attempts by minorities to enhance their own social status has precipitated or contributed to a general lack of interest in the welfare of other beings. At the same time, the very process of lowering blacks in social status may have raised animals closer to humans, in relative terms.[18] Nevertheless, some signs exist that consciousness of animal rights issues among blacks is increasing; at a rally protesting the use of animals in experiments in San Francisco, Alameda County Supervisor John George declared, "My people were the first laboratory animals in America."

With the exception of one group, the responses of the organizations which maintain information or which could estimate the average yearly income of their members indicate that it is low relative to the level of education, usually between ten and twenty thousand dollars. These responses, however, were generally from the smaller, more radical organizations whose members tend to be more active and ideological within the movement. The responses of Agenda's reader survey indicate that about seventy-three percent of their subscribers who are activists in the movement had incomes below $25,000 per annum.[19] The incomes for the many professionals in the movement are undoubtedly higher.

The age of the largest number of activists is between twenty-five and thirty-five, although the average ranges from organization to organization, depending on its activities and concerns. Student groups, of course, have much lower median ages, while members of humane organizations and more moderate groups tend to be much older. These findings are consistent with the results of a broad investigation conducted by Stephen R. Kellert, who administered a questionnaire to over 550 randomly selected individuals to determine American attitudes and behavioral relations toward animals and the environment. With regard to age, he found that while elderly persons had a greater tendency to view animals from a "highly detached, pragmatically oriented perspective," younger persons were far more inclined to seek "appreciatively oriented personal conduct and exposure."[20]

Most AR activists are also college-educated and have a relatively high knowledge about animals. The initial responses to the survey of Agenda readers indicates that eighty percent of the respondents had some college education and fourteen percent had earned doctoral degrees. Kellert's study also suggests that there are dramatic differences in attitudes toward animals between those who have received less than eighth grade education and those with college-level training. The former group is far more prone to possess a utilitarian, dominionistic, and even hostile attitude toward animals, while
the outlook of the latter group is more likely to be naturalistic or ecologistic.[21] Education, according to Kellert, is much more closely related to a positive attitude toward animals than wealth. These findings appear to have significant policy implications for AR groups, because they suggest that the role of education is vital to making progress and changing attitudes.

The occupations of AR activists are less homogeneous and range from the creative, scientific, and political in groups like Animal Rights Network in Chicago to strictly professional organizations such as the Animal Legal Defense Fund, Association of Veterinarians for Animal Rights, and Psychologists for the Ethical Treatment of Animals. A large percentage of individuals are involved in educational fields, and this phenomenon enhances the informational outlets of the movement. Philosophers, too, are becoming increasingly active in the movement.

Interestingly, there are many people in AR organizations with strong atheistic or agnostic beliefs in addition to those with strong religious convictions. This phenomenon may indicate, as other theorists in the century have suggested, that a movement like that of animal rights is either symptomatic or resultant of a more secular and humanitarian spirit. Religious activists often offer counter-arguments to the orthodox Judeo-Christian view that humans should have dominion over animals by pointing out that if animals have no souls, then the injustices inflicted upon them in this life will not be corrected in another, so that it is imperative to respect their lives here and now.

Two organizations, the International Society for Religion and Animal Rights and the International Network for Religion and Animals, were recently formed, in part, to explore such questions.

All of the organizations responding to a question about the percentage of vegetarians and vegans in their group indicated that a majority of their supporters could be classified as such. Several groups, in fact, are composed entirely of persons who follow a vegetarian diet. This kind of practice is generally indicative of the level of commitment of AR activists and the ideological nature of the movement. It also appears to be very beneficial to the movement, because it can act as a kind of free, informal, and educational mechanism to introduce the curious public to animal rights issues, function as a reminder to the individuals within the organizations of their social and political commitments, and underscore the gap between their practices and ideals and those of social institutions and the general populace.

Finally, the political leaning of the activists in the AR movement is decidedly left of center and Democratic in party affiliation. Many of the individuals have inclinations toward socialism, with which vegetarianism has been associated historically. This orientation is international as well, for the main group in Australia, Animal Liberation reports that its supporters are liberal, Labor Party members. The activists in the movement also appear to be very active politically outside the sphere of animal rights issues. Many people are vocal in such areas as feminism, imperialism, world hunger, and the peace movement because they perceive the mistreatment of animals as another manifestation of social injustice and the willingness of humans to exploit other beings.

In terms of policy implications, these results suggest that the AR movement has at least a fairly large potential constituency which could be capitalized upon through intensive educational and informational tactics. To enhance its legitimacy and strength, however, it must ultimately appeal to a broader cross-section of society and become a more integral part of an established political institution or party platform.

(To be continued in the next issue)
Notes


6. Ibid., pp. 46-7.


9. Ibid., p. 287. The suit brought against ASPCA was settled out of court, with the Society agreeing to certain stipulations.

10. Ibid. In the settlement of the suit brought against API, Belton Mauras, API's staff head, was ordered to resign from the Board of Directors and to account for $17,000 in unauthorized spending.


12. Martin Stephens, Ibid.

13. Ibid.


17. See, for example, the social and theoretical manifestations of this link in Richard Hofstadter's important work on *Social Darwinism in American Thought* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968).


19. "What Sort of Person Reads Agenda?," *Agenda: News Magazine of the Animal Rights Network* 3/3 (May-June, 1983), pp. 26-7. This news magazine was relied upon throughout the study, with more than fifteen of its thirty-page issues having been read and synthesized. Like so much of the voluminous data, it cannot be cited in every relevant situation; however, when it is appropriate to do so, it shall be referred to as *Agenda* and followed by the volume, number, and page.


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stage of development in the idea that no people should be slaves. Conceptually, the basic shift here has been made in the past two hundred years, with the shift, at least as regards relations among people, from the idea that there is a natural hierarchy, with one group destined to serve the interests of another, to the idea that we should all be given equal consideration and protection of our interests, that we should all be given an equal chance at a decent life and protection against being exploited by those stronger than ourselves. Liberating animals is nothing more than applying this same, thoroughly ordinary moral concern to those who differ from us not only in color, language, religion, and sex but in species.

Thus, liberating animals is not only the bringing of animals directly and fully into the arena of our moral concern, it is also the next logical step in our overcoming of our feudal heritage by substituting egalitarian for hierarchical presumptions. As this is accomplished, the same thing will happen

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