

Animal Rights Movement

The Animal Protection Movement. Prevention of cruelty to animals became an important movement in early 19th Century England, where it grew alongside the humanitarian current that advanced human rights, including the anti-slavery movement and later the movement for woman suffrage. The first anti-cruelty bill, intended to stop bull-baiting, was introduced in Parliament in 1800. In 1822 Colonel Richard Martin succeeded in passing an act in the House of Commons preventing cruelty to such larger domestic animals as horses and cattle; two years later he organized the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) to help enforce the law. Queen Victoria commanded the addition of the prefix "Royal" to the Society in 1840.

Following the British model, Henry Bergh organized the American SPCA in New York in 1866 after returning from his post in St. Petersburg as secretary to the American legation in Russia; he hoped it would become national in scope, but the ASPCA remained primarily an animal shelter program for New York City.

Other SPCAs and Humane Societies were founded in the U.S. beginning in the late 1860s (often with support from abolitionists) with groups in Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, and San Francisco among the first. Originally concerned with enforcing anti-cruelty laws, they soon began running animal shelters along the lines of a model developed in Philadelphia. The American Humane Association (AHA), with divisions for children and animals, was founded in 1877, and emerged as the leading national advocate for animal protection and child protection services.

As the scientific approach to medicine expanded, opposition grew to the use of animals in medical laboratory research -- particularly in the era before anesthetics and pain-killers became widely available. The anti-vivisection movement was strong in England and the United States in the 1890s (the American Anti-Vivisection Society was formed in Philadelphia in 1883), but was overwhelmed by the prestige of scientific medicine by the early twentieth century. The humane movement focused more on dogs and cats as the use of horses as beast of burden declined and the keeping of pets increased. The center of action shifted to protection of wild animals and birds, as undertaken by the Audubon Societies founded in the late 1890s.

In the period following World War II, the decline of agriculture as a way of life, the growth of affluent suburbia, and the increasing number of older people living independently combined to increase appreciation of dogs and cats as companion animals (43% of U.S. households have a pet; there are an estimated 51 to 58 million dogs, and the number of cats has grown rapidly to an estimated 49 to 60 million). Humane groups flourished on this expanding base of pet lovers. Growth of humane organizations led to conflicts among leaders over the extent to which principles of animal protection should be carried, and whether controversy would erode public support.

Around the time David Brower and the Young Turks of the World War II generation were shaking up the Sierra Club, a group of younger members were agitating to expand

the advocacy mission of the American Humane Association. The Humane Society of the U.S. (HSUS) split from the AHA in 1954, and then suffered its own splits in the 1960s. The Society for Animal Protective Legislation (SAPL) was established in 1955 to lobby for the first federal Humane Slaughter Act (passed in 1958); together with the Animal Welfare Institute also under the direction of Christine Stevens, SAPL has lobbied for every important piece of animal legislation since, including the Laboratory Animal Welfare Act (1966), the Endangered Species Act (1969), the Horse Protection Act (1970), the Marine Mammal Protection Act (1972) and their various subsequent extensions and strengthening amendments.

Helen Jones incorporated a group in 1959 that would become the International Society for Animal Rights; Cleveland Amory set up his Fund for Animals in 1967; and Belton Muras left HSUS in 1968 to form the Animal Protection Institute. Following the growing interest in primates stimulated by the highly publicized work of Jane Goodall with chimpanzees and Dian Fossey with gorillas, Shirley McGreal formed the International Primate Protection League in 1973. Despite the AHA's relative decline, its Hollywood office still holds the franchise on approving the use of animals in motion pictures.

The New Animal Rights Movement. The humane movement had been grounded primarily in benevolent sentiments (some would say sentimentality) toward animals. Eighteenth Century English philosopher Jeremy Bentham had placed animals within his utilitarian moral calculus of pleasure and pain, stating, "The question is not, Can they *reason?* nor, Can they *talk?* but, Can they *suffer?*" But this philosophical grounding for human relations with animals was left undeveloped. In the 1970s the humane movement began to find its first respectable intellectual and ethical underpinning in the work of philosophers Peter Singer and Tom Regan. Singer revived utilitarian thinking where Bentham left off, popularizing the concept of "speciesism" as a parallel to racism and sexism. Regan moved beyond the idea of animal welfare to argue the case for animal rights, not from utilitarianism, but in the natural rights tradition.

Philosophy aside, the civil rights and women's liberation movements directed fresh attention to human rights, and an extension of rights principles by analogy to animals proved an easier step than many would have anticipated. That step did not look so big when environmentalists were winning rights-like protection for endangered species, and attorneys were asking, "Do trees have standing?" Feminist biologist Caroline Merchant extended the question to ecosystems by asking, "Do rocks have rights?" Women make up some 75 percent of activists for animals, and it's not surprising that they've carried over language and lessons from the women's movement. Animal rights activists borrowed direct action tactics popularized by other movements, and applied them to oppose laboratory experimentation on animals, wearing fur, factory farming (particularly confinement-raising of veal), and hunting.

Environmental groups like Greenpeace and the Sea Shepherd Society showed how to draw attention to marine mammals and other endangered species. People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) emerged in 1980 as the most visible representative of the new militancy, with its demonstrations at the National Institutes of Health and as

spokesperson for the underground activities of the Animal Liberation Front. And taking a lesson from the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund, and with help from the Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund staff, Joyce Tischler organized the Animal Legal Defense Fund in 1981.

Several important animal protection victories in the 1970s and 80s were the product of coalitions, not single organizations. Led by one-time Maritime Union reformer and left journalist Henry Spira, 400 groups in the Coalition to Stop the Draize Rabbit Blinding Test got cosmetics companies like Avon and Revlon to develop alternatives to the infamous Draize Eye Irritancy Test. Spira was drawn to the animals' cause by taking a class on animal liberation with philosopher Peter Singer. Applying his activist background, Spira organized his first campaign of demonstrations against animal experimentation at the American Museum of Natural History in New York in 1976; the labs were closed in 1977. Spira's coalition then went on to obtain a repeal of New York State's pound seizure law. The Draize test was the target in 1980. Next the coalition took on the LD 50 test (the lethal dose of a toxic substance which will kill half or more of a group of test animals), getting the Food and Drug Administration to review its policy and acknowledge the test can be replaced by experiments using cell biology and other techniques. Spira's work helped introduce a new level of tactical and political sophistication to animal welfare advocacy.

The revived animal rights movement is still in an early stage of development. Many of the groups begun since the 1950s are in their first generation of leadership, and manifest "founders' syndrome" to one extent or another. Competition is still heavy for available issue niches on animal experimentation, farm animals, hunting, zoos and circuses, fur, and animal testing. Questions of "purity" divide animal activists, particularly over whether animal welfare and animal rights are complementary or contradictory. Must a true friend of animals be a vegetarian, or further, a vegan who eats no animal products? Can animal rights groups make alliances with mainstream conservation organizations who condone hunting (or at least do not officially oppose it)? Tom Regan upholds animal rights fundamentalism, a program of nothing less than a complete abolition of all exploitation of animals for human purposes. Others, including PETA's Ingrid Newkirk, argue that cooperation with all allies issue by issue is the only path to victories for animals. However impractical, utopian, or just plain wrongheaded many of their goals may appear to the general public -- and to many participants in other movements -- animal rights advocates have come a long way in the past decade, and are no longer out beyond the fringe.

Annotated Bibliography

Animal Welfare & Animal Rights: Although not the first book written on animal rights, Henry Salt's *Animals' Rights Considered in Relation to Human Progress* (1892; rpt. Society for Animal Rights, 1980) is a remarkable classic that bears reading today; his full range of concerns are sampled in *The Savor of Salt: A Henry Salt Anthology*, edited by George Hendrick and Willene Hendrick (Centaur Press, 1989). The relationship of Victorian times to the rise of the humane, antivivisection and conservation movements are considered in James Turner, *Reckoning with the Beast: Animals, Pain, and Humanity in the Victorian Mind* (Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1980).

Serious consideration of animals' moral claims on humans was introduced by Australian philosopher Peter Singer in his review essay, "Animal Liberation," in *The New York Review of Books*, 5 April 1973; the response to the article stimulated Singer to expand his arguments in *Animal Liberation* (Avon Books, 1975). See also Jim Mason and Peter Singer, *Animal Factories* (Crown Publishers, 1980); and *In Defense of Animals*, edited by Singer (Basil Blackwell, 1985). Singer champions the case for careful organizing and selection of targets in *Ethics into Action: Henry Spira and the Animal Rights Movement* (Rowman and Littlefield, 1998).

The prominent philosopher of animal rights, Tom Regan, states his position in *The Case for Animal Rights* (Univ. of California Press, 1983), and *The Struggle for Animal Rights* (International Society for Animal Rights, 1987). British philosopher Mary Midgley bases her more pragmatic animal welfare position on compassion in *Animals and Why They Matter* (Univ. of Georgia Press, 1984). For a particularly informative book on federal and state legislation, see *Animals and Their Legal Rights: A Survey of American Laws from 1641 to 1990* (4th ed., 1990), from the Animal Welfare Institute, P.O. Box 3650, Washington, DC 20007; 202-337-2332. James M. Jasper and Dorothy Nelkin present a sociological perspective in *The Animal Rights Crusade: The Growth of a Moral Protest* (The Free Press, 1992). Another historical and analytical view is Lawrence Finsen and Susan Finsen, *The Animal Rights Movement in America: From Compassion to Respect* (Twayne Publishers, 1994). Law professor Gary L. Francione defends animal rights over animal welfare in *Rain without Thunder: The Ideology of the Animal Rights Movement* (Temple Univ. Press, 1996). For a conservative critic, see Harold D. Guither, *Animal Rights: History and Scope of a Radical Social Movement* (Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1998).