

NEWS

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A Bill of Rights For Animals

If animals have consciousness, do they also have moral rights, such as the right not to be harmed or killed by humans?

This deceptively simple question is the focus of Tom Regan's provocative *THE CASE FOR ANIMAL RIGHTS* (to be published October 27, 1984, by the University of California Press).

Taking his arguments for animal rights beyond those of wildlife conservationists and of utilitarian philosophers like Peter Singer (with whom Regan has co-authored previous books), Regan argues from an extremely radical position. He asserts that no harm to animals, whether slaughtering them for food, hunting them for sport, experimenting on them for medical research, or causing the extinction of entire species, is morally permissible.

Regan begins by disproving Descartes' assumption that while all humans have moral rights, animals do not because they are machines without consciousness, "thoughtless brutes." Science has clearly shown that animals—at the very least mammals—do feel emotions and show consciousness. Therefore, if animals can feel pain, they can be "harmed," and, as a consequence, they have the right, as do all humans, to be protected from harm.

Our society is based on our mutual agreement to protect everyone, especially those, like children, who may not be able to protect themselves. According to the theory of moral rights, we each have a contract to refrain from doing harm to one another, unless irreparable harm will come from taking no action, as in self-defense. In the twentieth-century we have extended these rights to all humans, outlawing abrogation of such rights, as in slavery or medical experiments on humans.

Regan goes on to show, point by point, how we nonetheless continue to harm animals without even trying to find substitute behaviors that would serve our purposes—whether commercial or medical—equally well, without causing animals pain.

—Modern agricultural techniques have made vegetarianism a practical alternative to raising animals for food, which is often cruel (as in the case of milk-fed veal) and

always unjustly terminates the animal's life against its will.

—Sport hunting could easily be replaced by other forms of recreation without significant loss to hunters.

—Commercial tests for toxicity do have to use live animals:

—Other organic materials can be substituted in experiments, as the British firm Beauty without Cruelty has done.

—Products requiring animals tests can be eliminated. Would we really notice the loss of most cosmetics?

—Scientific experiments, both for teaching and medical research, often kill and maim animals needlessly and can be performed in other ways:

—Many tests are more effective when done on cell cultures and tissues grown in the laboratory.

—High school students can learn as much from models and films as from cutting up live frogs.

—Research on human disease may be most fruitful when pursued on the people who actually need to be cured, since the relation between human and animal pathology is tenuous at best. Why give 6,000 mice tumors, if no one believes this test proves that saccharin gives people cancer? Conversely, why develop a drug to cure cancer in dogs when we don't know if it will work on humans?

Regan argues that even when it might be more efficient to test drugs on animals, it is still not morally permissible, since we do not have the right to inflict suffering on another in order to save ourselves from suffering. And we clearly have no right to inflict pain in order to pursue our own pleasure.

What kind of world would we have if we protected the rights of animals as we do our own? Regan asserts it would be a world in which we would also be more sensible of human rights. Because we believe we "need" to kill animals for food, we also allow gratuitous cruelty, such as hunting or factory-like animal farming. Eliminate the justification for any killing, and you eliminate the excuses for all cruelty. Save the whales not because they're an endangered

species, but because they have the right, as do we all, to be saved.

All that is required of us is to use our imaginations. We can find alternatives that respect the rights of animals, asserts Tom Regan. We just haven't bothered to look for them. When men first suggested abolishing slavery or ceasing to use torture to obtain confessions from criminals, many thought that society would cease to function without the cruelties. Is it possible that we refuse to recognize that animals have feelings merely because we don't want to suffer the inconvenience of reorganizing our social institutions?

THE CASE FOR ANIMAL RIGHTS forces us all to examine this possibility.

TOM REGAN is Professor of Philosophy at North Carolina State University, where he has twice been named Outstanding Teacher and, in 1977, was selected Alumni Distinguished Professor. He has authored or edited nine books, published dozens of essays, and lectured throughout the English speaking world on issues in moral philosophy, both theoretical and applied. Recognized as the world's leading philosopher on the topic of animals rights, he has played an active role in making philosophy's contributions to many other important issues, from euthanasia to abortion, from the death penalty to nuclear war, more accessible to the non-philosopher.

... an important and necessarily controversial book which will lift the debate of treatment of animals to a new level of awareness and philosophical analysis. He presents persuasive and logically based arguments defending the equal rights of animals, as well as humans, to humane and respectful treatment. Dr. Regan's work is a revealing discussion which should be read by those on both sides of animal welfare issues.

Representative Tom Lantos
United States Congress

This definitive work, an eloquent and thorough presentation of the philosophy of animal rights, is an invaluable addition to the literature in this field. Tom Regan marshals his arguments and brings his scholarly approach to bear in such a way as to produce a case for protecting animals that is so persuasive as to be compelling. In laying out the philosophical foundations of the animal rights movement in such a detailed, scientific manner, he has produced a work that should have a significant impact in influencing the way we treat our fellow creatures. This book, which is destined to become a classic, is "must reading" for anyone interested in animals and their welfare.

Lewis Regenstein
Author of *The Politics Of Extinction*
and *America The Poisoned*

An important book, which states the case for the long overlooked justice towards animals, admirably. It is a book that should be widely read.

Ashley Montague
Department of Anthropology
Princeton University

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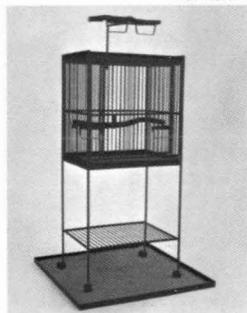
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