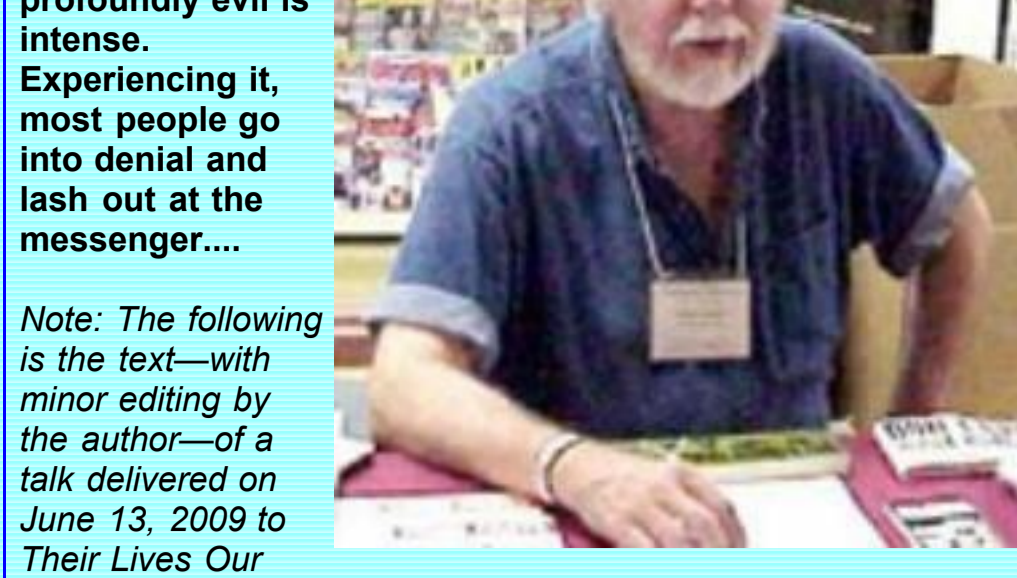


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EVANA interview with Matus Mendes about the 'International Vegetarian Week'

Norm Phelps: In Praise of 'The New Welfarism'



...the pain generated by the recognition that eating animals produces profound evils

Experiencing it, most people go into denial and lash out at the messenger....

Note: The following is the text of a talk delivered on June 13, 2009 to The Lives Our Voices, an animal rights conference sponsored by Compassionate Action for Animals in Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA.

Since I am going to present a case for what is often considered a "moderate" point of view, I want to be clear at the outset that I am not a moderate on the subject of animal rights.

A moral relationship to animals would have two elements. It would be based on moral parity between humans and nonhumans, and it would involve no human exploitation of other animals.

There's Less Here than Meets the Eye

The controversy between "abolitionists" and "new welfarists" is not at all about goals; it is entirely about strategy.

Since I am going to present a case for what is often considered a "moderate" point of view, I want to be clear at the outset that I am not a moderate on the subject of animal rights.

When we look at our own society in the present day, there is almost nowhere we can turn without seeing animal exploitation and murder.

Even more seriously, meat, eggs, and dairy are the foods that resonate with us emotionally. Meat evokes images of strength and power, while vegetables seem wimpy and lacking in character.

The emotional power of meat, eggs and dairy is multiplied because it is the material out of which so many of our defining rituals are constructed.

Second: Animal rights is the only social movement in history whose beneficiaries cannot participate in it and whose participants cannot benefit from it.

History's other social revolutions have typically drawn their momentum from the population that would benefit from success: women in the women's movement, blacks in the American civil rights movement.

The animal rights movement has no access to the indomitably motivated and endlessly renewable resource that has been available to every other social justice movement—the victims themselves.

Third: Most people believe that their health, happiness, and prosperity depend on the abuse and murder of animals.

For people who grew up eating meat, eggs, and dairy, they can be as hard to give up as any other addiction.

Likewise, most people believe that their health and longevity depend on animal research. The benefits of animal research are sometimes real, more often imagined.

Fourth: All too many people predicate their self-worth on feeling superior to nonhuman animals.

The longing to feel superior to someone else is among the deepest, darkest urges of the human spirit—and one of the most difficult to root out.

Ancient Greeks felt superior to "barbarians." Christians and Muslims feel superior to "infidels," including each other.

And finally: When you recognize the justice of the animals' cause, you understand for the first time that your life up until now has been based on immoral acts.

American economist John Kenneth Galbraith is widely quoted as saying that "In the choice between changing one's mind and proving there's no need to do so, most people get busy on the proof."

This is because it is urgently important to all of us to think of ourselves as moral people.

For this reason, abolitionist campaigns alone, unsupported by other strategies, will never reach most members of the public.

This process usually begins by drawing people's attention to some atrocity for which they do not feel personally responsible.

A Foolish Consistency "Abolitionists" have been seduced by a theory. And the theory that possesses them says that the means must always be logically consistent with the goal.

History is littered with the wreckage of elegant and reasonable-sounding theories that crashed and burned when they collided with reality.

One-track activism ignores the fact that converting people to animal rights is not primarily a matter of logic.

It is true that we need philosophers and activists like Gary Francione and Alex Her shaft, founder and president of the Farm Animal Rights Movement (FARM) conducting exclusively abolitionist advocacy.

Moving Forward Step by Step Bismarck was right when he said that politics is the art of the possible.

FARM, which is one of the most active groups in the US opposing animal agriculture, refused to support a California ballot initiative in the 2008 election (1) —known as Proposition 2—to ban battery cages and gestation crates because it was a "welfarist" measure.

The Limits of Flexibility There is, however, one caveat that I want to place on this: we must never claim that eliminating the egregious practices of factory farming will render animal agriculture morally acceptable.

When you say that cage free is "more humane" than battery cages, that is a true statement, and it does not send a wrong message.

Turning our Backs on Suffering There is a second reason why I am opposed to one-track activism. Suffering matters—it matters a great deal—I think it is ethically grotesque that animal activists, the only voices that animals have to speak in their defense, should try to shame or browbeat other activists into silence in the face of unspeakable animal suffering.

The ultimate crime against animals is their murder, whether that murder is preceded by torture or what Scottish philosopher David Hume called "gentle usage." But this does not mean that torture is of no consequence and should not be opposed on its own merits.

You can't walk a mile in the shoes of a battery chicken, because battery chickens can't walk a foot, much less a mile. But stand for an hour in the cage of a battery chicken. Stand jammed so tightly in a cage with other birds that you cannot turn around or stretch your wings.

Put yourself in the place of a battery hen. If your advocates are unable to prevent your murder, would you rather they do, sit on their hands and refuse to ease your suffering, explaining that they have an elegant theory—supported by no actual evidence—that they think will lead to the abolition of all animal agriculture at some unknown time decades after you are dead?

In her book "Speciesism," Joan Dunayer uses an example so nazivortification camp." Dunayer tells us, "And someone on the outside asked me 'Do you want me to work for better living conditions, more humane deaths in the gas chambers, or the liberation of all concentration camps?'" I'd answer, "Liberation."

The unspoken premise underlying Dunayer's rhetorical question is that a campaign to abolish the camps would have the same likelihood of success as a campaign to ease the inmates' suffering.

In 1992, Switzerland became the first country in the world to ban battery cages. Since then, several other European nations have followed suit.

Or, if you feel that you can be more effective campaigning solely for abolition, do so. We all have limited time, energy, and resources, and we have to devote those where we feel we can do the most good.

Alex Her shaft once said that we mustn't get hung up on suffering." Dr. Her shaft, like Gary Francione and other one-track activists, believes that focusing on suffering undermines abolition.

The Measures of Progress Reform campaigns are succeeding on three fronts. First, they are reducing the suffering of tens of millions of animals right now and are demonstrating the ability to reduce the suffering of billions of animals over the next few years.

Second, they are driving up the cost of animal agriculture to the point that the industry views them as a financial liability.

Third, reform campaigns are putting animal suffering and death on the public's radar screen in ways that generate much less resistance than the pure vegan message often does; they are causing people to think of animals as morally important.

A vegan for twenty-five years, Norm Phelps is an American animal rights activist who lives outside of Washington, D. C. with his wife, Patti Rogers, and their family of rescued cats.

Source: Norm Phelps - Website
Link: New Book: The Longest Struggle: Animal Advocacy from Pythagoras to PETA
Link: The Dominion of Love: Animal Rights According to the Bible (Lantern, 2002)
Link: The Great Compassion: Buddhism and Animal Rights (Lantern, 2004)
Link: The Longest Struggle: Animal Advocacy from Pythagoras to PETA (Lantern, 2007)

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