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Gary Francione

Transcript of [interview with Gary Francione](#), Feb. 6 2002

Lauren: Hello and welcome to Animal Voices. I'm Lauren.

Najda: Hi, I'm Najda, co-hosting.

Lauren: I'm really excited about today's show. We've been talking about it in on the air for quite a while now. Trying to hook things up on community radio is always a bit of a task. But we're going to be interviewing Gary Francione. Gary Francione is quite well known, I would say, within the animal rights community. He's a professor of law at Rutgers University School of Law, as well as the author of such books as *Rain Without Thunder: The Ideology of the Animal Rights Movement*; *Animals, Property, and The Law*; *Ethics and Actions*; and *Introduction to Animals Rights: Your Child or The Dog?*, as well as numerous published articles.

To say that Francione is controversial is quite the understatement. He disturbs people in and outside of the animal rights movement, he challenges the welfarist mentality, welfare type actions, even if they're done under the guise of animal rights. He definitely pushes people's buttons, so we're really looking forward to talking with him today.

Thank you for being on the show today.

Gary: My pleasure.

Lauren: I think we'll start off with some general questions. Your most recent book is called *Introduction to Animals Rights: Your Child or The Dog?* I was wondering if you could reflect on why you chose that question as a question to launch a discussion about animal rights.

Gary: Well, I've been doing this now for about twenty years, and if I had five cents for every time someone said to me, "You believe in animal rights, but if it were a question of your child or the dog, which one would you save?"

And I've always thought it's sort of a crazy question. But I chose it because I was actually writing this book for a general audience, for people who weren't familiar with the animal rights question, and for whom one of the first things that comes to their mind when they think about the animal rights issue is they say, "If you believe animals have rights, then that would mean that you think it's all right to choose an animal over a human in a situation of true conflict."

And one of the things I argue in the book is, if I were walking by a burning house, and I saw an elderly person who I knew was dying of a terminal illness, and a young person — two human animals — in that house, and I had time to save only one (by definition I couldn't save both), so I ran in and I saved the young person simply because I made a decision that nothing I would do in that situation would be morally perfect. I could only do what I could do and I would save the young person. Does that mean it's OK to use elderly people in biomedical experiments, or eat them, or put them in rodeos, circuses, or zoos? And the answer is, of course not.

So even if I were walking by the burning house, confronted with saving a human or an animal, and I chose to save the human, what does that tell us? It doesn't tell us that it's OK to eat animals, or to use them in experiments, or anything like that. It tells us that in situations of true conflict, we have to make choices. And one of the primary themes of my book is to say, in 99.99999% of the cases, the conflicts that we have with nonhuman animals are conflicts that we have created. Because we domesticate them, we bring them into existence for the sole purpose of exploiting them, and then we sit around wringing our hands saying, "What are our moral obligations to animals?"

So I wanted to use that question to launch a whole series of different themes and

issues, and discuss them for people who really weren't familiar with the animal rights question. And I want to add one thing, and that is, when I talk about animal rights, I think a lot of confusion amongst people who aren't familiar with it, indeed, people who are familiar with it, there's a lot of confusion about what "animal rights" means. Are we saying that animals have the same rights as humans? Well, I'm not. I think there are some people who do maintain that animals have the same rights as humans. I maintain animals have one right: the right not to be property.

I don't even understand when folks start talking about the various rights that animals should have. When people say, "Should the cow have the right to sue?" Because I'm a lawyer and a law professor and people say, "Should a cow have the right to sue the farmer?" To me that's sort of a silly question. The question for me is, "Why is the cow there in the first place?" If animals weren't property, we wouldn't domesticate animals and we wouldn't be bringing them into existence for the purpose of exploiting them. So my argument is that animals have one right: the right not to be property.

Of course once we give them that one right, once we accord them or recognize they have that one right, the world changes dramatically. Because it means we can no longer engage in the institutional exploitation that we engage in every second of every minute of every day, which assumes that animals are nothing but property.

Lauren: I wanted to shift the focus a little bit to what I saw as the central theme of *Rain Without Thunder*. You are very clear about trying to differentiate between rightist discourse, rightist philosophy and a welfare philosophy. Could you explain that to our listeners why that's an important distinction, and what you meant in the book by "new welfarists."

Gary: Well, in the 19th century in the United States, there were two groups of people, two positions with respect to human slavery. There were those who said that we have to regulate human slavery to make it more humane. And then there were those people who said the institution of slavery is inherently wrong and needs to be abolished. We must reject it, it's morally unconscionable.

And the people in the latter group, who believed that slavery should be abolished, did not agree with or support efforts by the regulationists (the people who believed that slavery had to be regulated) to make slavery a more "humane" institution. So they would not support laws that would make slavery more humane. Their position was: we can't buy into this at all, slavery is wrong, it should be abolished. We need to be moving towards the abolition of slavery, rather than trying to make slavery a more humane institution. I mean, you can put a symphony in a concentration camp, and provide music for people on the way to the gas chambers, but it's still a concentration camp.

And so what I tried to argue in *Rain Without Thunder* was that as a theoretical matter there's a huge difference between welfare and rights. It's the same difference that existed between the regulation of slavery and the abolition of slavery. But I also argued in *Rain Without Thunder* that there was absolutely no proof whatsoever that welfarism worked. For those people who argued that welfarism is a way of reducing suffering *now* for animals, the answer is that's nonsense. There is absolutely no empirical evidence whatsoever to suggest that welfarist reforms actually do result in the reduction of suffering, or any significant reduction of suffering for any significant number of animals.

When I used the expression "new welfarism" what I meant was, those people who call themselves animal rights people, and who believe in the ultimate end of abolition, but who believe that regulation is a way to abolition. To those people I argued, look folks, there is no historical evidence whatsoever that welfarism has ever led to the abolition of any practice. Indeed, what welfarism tends to do is to further entrench those institutions of exploitation by making people feel better about them.

Case in point, right now what's going on in the States (which is really obscene in my judgement) is that a number of these animal rights organizations are now busy praising organizations like McDonald's and Burger King because they are supposedly subscribing to new humane slaughtering procedures.

If you think about that for a second, first of all, I do not think that those procedures will in fact do very much for animals. What those procedures will do, and what the praising of those procedures by animal rights organizations will do, is make a lot more people feel a lot more comfortable about eating meat. And indeed, I've had a number of discussions with people, a number of my colleagues at the university say, "I now feel better about taking my kids to McDonald's because PETA says that they're a humane organization and that they're moving in the right direction. So now I don't feel bad about taking my kids to McDonald's."

I don't think that those sort of welfarist things do anything at all except give animal organizations fundraising campaigns and make people feel better about exploiting animals. I don't think they do anything for the animals. So when I talked about new welfarism, I was saying look, in many ways the animal rights people now are really no different from the welfarists of the 1850s. The folks in the 1850s would have agreed also that ultimately one day we'll end it all, but right now we've just got to worry about reforming it.

The new welfarists are basically taking the same position as the old welfarists did, except they would rather go naked than wear fur, or whatever it is that they do these days. They add that sort of gloss to it and call it radical. It's not radical at all. Indeed, it's incredibly reactionary.

Najda: I wonder if we could talk a little bit more about the concept of animal welfare. In the book *Rain Without Thunder*, you categorize with examples the welfare movement as often being very similar to the animal exploitation movement, in terms of the goals and the agendas. Can you give some examples of that so people can understand where you're coming from and what you mean by that?

Gary: Sure. If you look at most of the welfarist legislation — and I'll confine my remarks to the United States, because I did have something to do with some Canadian legislation some years ago, but as I get closer to fifty my memory gets more faded [laughs] so I don't want to discuss that, because I don't remember it well enough. But with respect to the welfarist legislation that we've seen in the United States — things like the Animal Welfare Act, the Humane Slaughter Act, the recent legislation that was passed, the Chimpanzee Health Improvement, Maintenance and Protection Act, which was supported by many of the large animal organizations in the States — these are all pieces of legislation which are by and large supported by the exploiters themselves.

Let's take the Animal Welfare Act as an example. The Animal Welfare Act basically doesn't prohibit anything. In a nutshell, it's a very long statute and there are a lot of regulations, but to boil it down to one concept, once that laboratory door is closed, those vivisectioners can do whatever they want with those animals. Whatever they get the money to do, they can do. The law doesn't do anything to prohibit any particular forms of experimentation. What the Animal Welfare Act does is to say, you've got to give them a certain amount of food, you've got to give them a certain amount of water (unless they're involved in food deprivation or water deprivation experiments), you've got to give them a certain cage space.

The biomedical community went along with the Animal Welfare Act because they took the position that if you are not providing food and water and enough space for the animal, then the animal will have stress that the animal suffers over and above that of the stress that the animal feels in the experiment. And that may confound the variables and thereby threaten the integrity of the scientific data that comes out of those experiments. So it was a very odd sort of union where you had the animal movement and the vivisectioners all agreeing that the Animal Welfare Act was a good thing.

Same thing with the Humane Slaughter Act of 1958. It was supported by the animal movement. It was also supported by the animal agriculture industry, because one of the things that the Humane Slaughter Act did was by requiring animals be stunned before they're shackled and hoisted, it cuts down on the number of work-related injuries and the number of lawsuits they face from workers that are injured.

And with all of these welfarist pieces of legislation, generally they get so watered down because as a matter of pragmatic politics, the only way these things pass is if industry goes along with them. And the only way industry goes along with them is to water them down to the point where they basically serve some interest of industry. It's a win-win situation for everybody except the animals. It's a win situation for the animal people because then they can go back to their donors and to the public and say, "Look at the wonderful things we've done, give us more money." And it's a win situation for industry because industry can then promote itself as doing "the humane thing." But industry also gets the benefits of a decrease of worker-related injuries. Industry also gets the benefit of better (at least what they would claim is better) scientific data, which is not confounded by variables of stress from the result of deprivation of food and water and space and things like that.

In almost all these situations that I have seen and studied — and I have spent a good deal of my academic life and my professional life as a lawyer working on these sorts of things — I can't think of one instance, not one instance of welfarist legislation that's done anything to help animals. I can give you lots of examples of welfarist legislation from which animal organizations have made trillions of dollars in campaign contributions, and I can give you examples of situations where industry and research has benefitted from welfarist legislation. I can't give

you one example of a piece of legislation where the animals have benefitted.

Lauren: I was interested if we could talk about, I think it's Farm Sanctuary, right now they're doing various different campaigns to try to get crating systems banned. Would you see that as a welfare move then, or not?

Gary: I'd have to look at the individual campaign. One of the points I made in *Rain Without Thunder* is, maybe we all ought to stop this business of trying to get laws passed and trying to deal with this as a legal matter. Let's think about this for a second. Let's assume tomorrow that a law was passed that said you couldn't eat meat. That would be great, wouldn't it? Yes, it would be great, and it would result in probably a lot of violence and a revolution [laughs], because people wouldn't tolerate it.

I'm not even sure we're at a point where we think people of colour have rights or women have full rights. I don't believe we're *there* yet. So I certainly don't think we're at a point where there's a critical mass of people who believe that animals have moral status and that animals should not be property. If that is in fact true, then it seems to me that we are wasting time and resources trying to solve this problem through legal means, through court cases and through pieces of legislation.

Let's do a thought experiment for a second. Let's assume that all the resources of all of the animal groups (and the animal groups have lots of money), if we took all of those resources and we had a sustained campaign to relentlessly educate every man, woman and child, anyone that we could get our hands on, educate them about the virtues and values of a vegan diet, and we did that for five years. My guess is at the end of the five years — and I'll be real conservative about this, something I'm not normally [laughs] — we would certainly, if we all did this, if all of us who are interested in this, if Farm Sanctuary, PETA and all these other groups got together and educated people about veganism, my guess is at the end of the five years you would have at least a thousand more vegans.

Now, at the end of five years, if you have a thousand more vegans and you compare that with whatever you would get as a result of putting the same number of dollars and the same amount of person power and labour into those campaigns to get veal crates banned (or whatever people are talking about), my guess is you would reduce a lot more suffering if you had a thousand more vegans. And you would have certainly a lot more, I'm just using that as a ridiculously low number. Certainly you'd have a lot more.

We're sort of stuck in a rut where we think that the way to solve the problem is the law. And the problem is the law is always a bad device to use when you don't have a critical mass of people who agree morally with the underlying moral theory that the law is trying to implement. Case in point, abortion in the United States. In 1973 the Supreme Court hands down *Roe vs. Wade* and says women have a right to terminate pregnancy. The reason why the Supreme Court did that in 1973 is the Supreme Court realized that the federal legislature and state legislature were not about to give women that right as a legislative manner, because there were too many people who disagreed with the morality of abortion. The result is, from the moment *Roe* was handed down, that decision has been eroded and eroded and eroded, to the point now where about 70-80% of the women in the United States don't even live near an abortion provider, abortion has been so severely restricted and regulated — even though it's still a constitutional right, and will probably be a constitutional right until George Bush gets the next Supreme Court appointment, and then it *won't* be a constitutional right anymore. But right now it's a constitutional right that for many women is meaningless. And the reason for that is that there are too many people in the United States who don't agree with that — wrongly in my view, I support very strongly the right of a woman to choose to terminate pregnancy. They don't agree with the argument that abortion is necessary if women are to ever overcome second-class status and the problems of patriarchy, that the right to terminate pregnancy is a necessary right. There aren't enough people who agree with that position. You can use the law in that situation, but the result will be exactly what the result has become: the law will be meaningless for most women, and the moment they have an opportunity, the law will be reversed.

So part of the problem I have with the way most of these animal groups approach this, is they think, "We've got to have campaigns!" I understand, it's a business issue. You're running an animal rights group, you've got to keep going to the public continually, continually, continually to raise money. You don't raise money by telling them you've got wonderful educational programs that are teaching people about the virtues of a vegan diet. You raise money from people by telling them, "We've got this great lawsuit, we've got this great piece of legislation, this is going to be great, this is going to make a huge difference." And the answer is, it's nonsense. Case in point, look at Farm Sanctuary's campaign about the Downed Animal Act. I wrote about that in *Rain Without*

Thunder. The Downed Animal Act didn't do anything whatsoever to address the issue of non-ambulatory animals. By the time it got to the California legislature, the law was so watered down that the California veal producers and all of the other meat producers in California, and indeed throughout the country, were supporting the legislation because it basically didn't do anything.

And when I hear Farm Sanctuary say that it gives them the right to go onto the property, and it gives them the right to demand this and that, the answer is that's nonsense. Look at the law. The law doesn't give Farm Sanctuary any rights to do anything. Nor does it require that those animals be killed immediately. It says "removed or killed immediately." And the reality is that the same stuff that was going on before is going on now. The only difference is there are a lot of folks out there who think, at least in California, the problem has been solved. The answer is, no it hasn't. It hasn't been solved at all. The non-ambulatory animal problem still exists in California, despite what Farm Sanctuary says.

But again, you've got to understand, Farm Sanctuary is a business. It's got to keep that money coming in in order to keep running. And in order to do that, you've got to have campaigns. At least that's the perception: you've got to have campaigns. I believe that if the animal people would only get together and have a unified message of abolition, they might not get any laws passed for the next ten years, but they could educate a lot of people so that maybe one day effective laws could start being passed.

But right now the idea that we're ever going to get any meaningful legislation, when animal agriculture is second only to oil in terms of the number of dollars represented as an economic activity, is crazy. I'm often criticised for being utopian. I find that comical. What's utopian and what's unrealistic is the belief of the welfarists and of the new welfarists that they're going to solve this problem by getting pieces of legislation — Downed Animal Acts, veal crate bans, things like that. Those things *never work*. They always get watered down to the point where they're absolutely meaningless because that's the only way they're going to get passed.

When you are fighting animal agriculture, you are dealing with a huge — it's an enormous, enormous economic activity. You're not going to get any meaningful legislation until you have a critical mass of people who really believe that there are serious moral issues raised by our treatment of nonhumans, and who are willing... look, the bottom line is, I've been doing this work for twenty years, and I can tell you there are a lot of leaders of the animal rights movement who aren't vegans. There are a lot of animal rights people who aren't even vegetarians, but there are a lot of *leaders* of the movement who aren't vegetarians or vegans. And I think that's really the problem. Because if you really believe in abolition, you might not be able to effect it throughout the world tomorrow, but you can effect it in your life right now. You can apply the principle of abolition in your life right now, and become a vegan.

But you know, I know lots of animal rights people who aren't vegans. Lots and lots and lots of them. Indeed, I know more leaders of the animal rights movement in the United States — I'm not speaking about Canada, I don't know enough about the Canadian movement — but in the United States, I know more of the leaders of the animal rights movement that are not vegans than are vegans. So I guess, if you're not willing to apply the principle of abolition in your own life, if that cheese pizza or that ice cream or that odd bit of fish is something that you still have to have, well then it doesn't surprise me that you think that my ideas are wrong. [laughs] But that's OK.

Lauren: Thank you for that, Gary. It's very inspiring, to say the least. Najda, I think you had a question.

Najda: I was trying to picture someone listening and feeling overwhelmed and frustrated about work that they might be doing. I think a lot of people give support to a lot of campaigns because they think that they will make a difference. What would you suggest to people at the individual level, what's the most effective thing that they can do to empower themselves and to feel like they're empowering animals and working towards an abolitionist goal?

Gary: The very first thing, the necessary first step is to become a vegan. You want to empower animals, you want to do something for animals? Stop eating them, wearing them, using them. Stop buying into the system of exploitation. Stop buying into it completely. Let me say this: if enough people took that first step, and enough people really understood that this issue is so important that however much I love that piece of cheese pizza, however much I love that ice cream, it doesn't matter.

Are there things that people can do? And the answer is right now, as I argued in *Rain Without Thunder* — and I think I wrote that book in 1996, and what I said in 1996 I still maintain — right now, the thing that we all need to do is to educate

other people. We need to make ourselves aware of the arguments, we need to learn... I'm very distressed when I see animal rights people running up to people wearing fur coats and screaming at them. You don't educate people by screaming at them. You educate them by getting them to understand your point of view. I've been a teacher for twenty years, and I have a fairly good reputation as a teacher, and the one thing that I have tried to do over the years is try to understand that you've got to persuade the student. You don't come from on high with the truth. You've got to explain your position and argue your position to people.

Many of the animal rights people I know, yes, they want to do work and things like that, and they're really interested in helping animals, but they won't sit down and they won't read. They won't make themselves knowledgeable about how to answer questions, like when someone says, "Yes, but we've been eating meat for many, many years, it's a tradition." Or, "Isn't it natural to eat meat?" Or, "But animals eat each other." You need to have an answer to people's questions when they ask you those questions, which is another reason why I wrote *Introduction to Animal Rights*, was because I have this appendix in the back of the book in which I deal with a lot of these questions. The idea was to sort of arm people with knowledge, so they could go and educate other people. You don't need to be involved in flashy campaigns, you don't need a whole lot of money to do this. But what we need to be doing is educating people, making people aware of how meat is produced, how dairy products are produced, and provoking people to confront the moral...

You know, I'm teaching a course this semester in law and philosophy. Yesterday we started talking about the concept of personhood. And I said to my students — I started talking about the animal issue — I said, "I'll make an argument that you ought to become vegans, and I won't even mention animal rights." And they all sort of chuckled and said, "No, you can't do that," and I said, "Sure I can."

I said, "How many people here agree with the principle that it's wrong to inflict unnecessary suffering on animals?" And every single student raised his or her hand. And then I made the argument that if necessity means anything, it means pleasure, amusement or convenience can't be a sufficient justification for imposing pain. I mean, if you have a rule that says the imposition of unnecessary pain is wrong, but it's OK to do it if it brings you pleasure, amusement, or convenience, then the rule that it's wrong to inflict unnecessary pain becomes meaningless.

I said, "Now, would you all agree that if necessity means anything at all, its minimal meaning has to be that pleasure, amusement or convenience can't justify the imposition of pain or suffering?" They all agreed with that. And then I basically said, "It's 2002. Nobody, not even the United States government, the prime disseminator of disinformation in the universe, maintains that you need to eat meat to lead an optimally healthy lifestyle." Indeed, an increasing number of mainstream health care people are maintaining that the more animal products you eat, the more danger you have to your health. Bottom line is, the best justification we have for inflicting suffering, pain, and death on nine billion creatures every single year is *they taste good*.

If you take the principle that it's wrong to inflict unnecessary suffering seriously, you've got to go home tonight and before you put any of that stuff in your mouth again, you've got to ask your self a question: do I take morality seriously? In which case, you've got to put the fork down. Or am I just a B.S.er who says he or she takes moral ideas seriously, but really doesn't? And I'll tell you something, it provoked an hour and a half discussion, and I think a lot of the students walked out of there, I hope a lot of the students walked out of there at least thinking about... and I didn't even mention animal rights.

I really think that it's important to educate people and to provoke them to think about this issue. Most people — maybe I'm being naïve about this, in which case efforts at education are useless but so are efforts at legislation useless — but I think most people like to think that they take moral ideas seriously. So the idea is to persuade them, the idea is to educate them. We have never done that as a movement. We instead jump to step 12 rather than taking steps 1 through 11. You are never going to get any meaningful legislation or any meaningful social change on this issue at all unless there's a critical number of people who believe that animals matter, that animals have moral status, that animals ought not to be property.

As long as you've got your supposedly radical animal rights organizations saying, "Oh yes, McDonald's is doing just fine" — I think the whole McDonald's thing is obscene for a number of reasons. It's not just a question of the animals, it's the way they treat their workers, what McDonald's does to the environment. There are a whole host of things that McDonald's does that in my judgment are quite wrong. To have your supposedly radical animal organizations saying, "Well, they're going in the right direction, they're making really significant

changes," what that is doing is confusing people. It's not educating people about the horrors of the slaughterhouse and the horrors of how meat and dairy is produced, how leather is produced, and all of that stuff. It's confusing people. And I think it's confusing them very, very much.

I actually had another professor at the university say to me, "Are you going to start eating meat again?" And I said, "What are you talking about?"

Najda: [laughs]

Gary: And he said, "I just read in the paper over the weekend that PETA — isn't that that group..." And I said, "Look, I haven't had anything to do with PETA in over a decade." He said, "But the PETA people, they're supposed to be the far-out ones, aren't they? They say that McDonald's is really moving in the right direction. Doesn't that change your thinking?" And I said, "No. No, no, not at all."

You see, that's the sort of effect that those sorts of campaigns have. They don't do any good for animals. What they do is, they get publicity for PETA. I will tell you, if I was the chairman of McDonald's, I would have made that deal in a heartbeat. You get the endorsement of a radical (supposedly radical, it's become a very reactionary and sexist organization) animal rights organization to say that you're going in the right direction, you're producing humane hamburgers. Well Hell, I'd take that deal in a second. That's a no-brainer if you're McDonald's.

Najda: Gary, I'm really curious to hear what kind of reaction you have from people in the animal rights community. Do you find that any of the larger organizations are even open to this kind of dialogue?

Gary: No, absolutely not. When I wrote *Rain Without Thunder* I actually had people spit on me at conferences. I got death threats. I really enjoy it. I mean, I've been doing this for twenty years. I debate vivisection all the time, I go to universities and medical schools and I debate vivisection. Do they get upset with me? Sure they do. Nobody ever calls me names, no one ever calls and makes death threats. I have had some hunters give me death threats over the years, but I've had much more violent reactions from these supposedly peace-loving animal people than I've gotten from all of the exploiters put together, multiplied by five.

I've been beaten up by police at demonstrations, and I was once assaulted by a vivisectioner. He actually kicked me in the head. And as I said, I've had some issues with hunters over the past few years and whatnot. But I've had much more violence expressed to me by the peace lovers and the supposedly compassionate animal people, and that makes me very sad. Actually one of the reasons why I don't speak at many animal rights conferences anymore is I'm just getting too old for that sort of stuff. To have young people come up to me and spit on me and say that I'm a traitor because I've criticised PETA, I find that very disconcerting, but it happens all the time.

Introduction to Animal Rights is a far more radical book than *Animal Liberation*. One of the things I discuss in that book is Peter Singer's views are really the foundation of new welfarism. I think that by taking the position that anything that decreases suffering is something that we ought to pursue — any measure that you can think of in your head, any measure whatsoever I could describe for you in some way that it will decrease suffering — if it decreases suffering for one animal, Peter says, then you ought to do it. That basically means that anything goes, and any idiotic welfarist campaign that people can devise can always be packaged as decreasing suffering. I think that in fact the whole utilitarian philosophy has bolstered that meaningless pursuit of meaningless legislation and meaningless court reforms and things like that.

But clearly that book is more radical than *Animal Liberation*. And it even goes much further than Tom Regan's book *The Case for Animal Rights*. For Tom, in order to be a right holder, you have to be a being that has a certain preference, autonomy, and my argument is that sentience alone is all you need for membership in the moral community. So my book actually goes much further than either *Animal Liberation* or *The Case for Animal Rights*, but very few of the animal rights groups are promoting it because they don't like my views. I still have a whole file of letters that I got in 96 and 97 when I wrote *Rain Without Thunder*, where people actually sent me a large number of death threats. [laughs] That's what's so very interesting to me: the only people who attack me more than the exploiters are the animal people. They're the people who criticise me more, and more personally. Vivisectioners will take issue with me, and say that my ideas are wrong, or that my ideas are radical, that my ideas are too far out, or they're too out of sync, or that's I'm socialist. They'll say things like that. But the animal people will attack me personally. They'll say really horrible things and they will engage in violent acts towards me, and I find that very disconcerting.

Najda: What do you think would be a forum where some of these ideas can be exchanged to try for the movement to have some re-energizing and maybe re-

evaluating where people are going?

Gary: I wish I had an answer. My view is, I just keep doing what I'm doing. I keep writing my books, I keep doing radio shows like this, I do television shows, I do university debates. I'm giving a keynote address at the University of Richmond at the end of March where I will be among some of the most prominent philosophers in North America, giving a presentation on these sorts of issues. As far as the organized movement is concerned, I don't hold out a whole lot of hope that discourse and discussion like mine is ever... I mean, if you're running an animal rights group, I'm about as high on your list of people to include in the discussion as Dracula would be. Obviously, people like Farm Sanctuary and PETA aren't interested in discussion or dialogue with me. And I find that sad. I've known Lori and Gene, the people at Farm Sanctuary, for a long time. And Ingrid and Alex, Ingrid Newkirk and Alex Pacheco, I met when I first got involved with this. I was PETA's first general counsel many, many, many years ago in the early 1980s, when I was a lot younger than I am now. But there's really no discussion with these people on these issues. I've tried to have discussions with them and they're not interested.

I remember when Farm Sanctuary was going to have a big bash to celebrate the movie *Babe*, they wanted me to endorse it and to come out and speak, etc. And I said no, I will have nothing to do with that. I will have nothing to do with a movie in which animals were used, in which animals were killed, in which animals were injured. I don't care whether it has a pro-animal message, to me it would be like making a movie with a pro-woman message in which a woman was raped. I would not support that either, even if it had a good message. I would add as a footnote, for those people who think *Babe* had such a great message, I wonder why McDonald's appropriated it immediately and started putting out Babe Happy Meals. Obviously, the educational value of the film was somewhat lost.

I remember having a discussion with them and saying, "How is this any different from making a movie about women's rights and raping a woman?" Nobody has an answer for that, except, "Gary, just stop with this and just cooperate." And the answer is no, I'm not interesting in cooperating. I'm not a corporate boy, I'm not interested in the corporate animal welfare business. I'm not interested in their millions of dollars and their campaigns. I'm interested in focusing them. They don't wish to be focused, they don't even wish to discuss these issues.

Friends of Animals is one of the few exceptions to the rule. It's also one of the few organisations that is headed by a woman, Priscilla Feral, who takes feminism seriously. That's another part of the problem: the movement has never recognized the connections between other social justice movements. Which is why you have groups like PETA with these idiotic I'd rather go naked than wear fur... I think PETA has gone so far over the edge in terms of its sexism. I used to always say to Ingrid Newkirk, as long as we continue to treat women like pieces of meat, we're going to continue to treat meat like pieces of meat. That was one of the reasons why I stopped having anything to do with PETA. Many years ago, when they started with these I'd rather go naked than do whatever campaigns, I said to them if we think speciesism is bad because it's like racism and sexism, then we have a position on racism and sexism, namely: racism and sexism are bad. We ought not to be promoting sexism and racism, and I think that those anti-fur campaigns and some of the more recent campaigns they've had — which have actually been in my judgment just outrageously stupid and silly — are very, very sexist.

But Priscilla Feral at Friends of Animals is one of the few leaders of the organised movement who takes feminism seriously. A couple of years ago she had a conference in which we talked about the connections between feminism and the civil rights movement and these sorts of things. We're going to have another conference, I think she's got it scheduled in September. People who are interested can contact Friends of Animals and find out. We're going to talk about these issues, the relationship with other social justice movements, and issues of grassroots activism.

I think one of the things that has to be done, if we're ever going to see a true and vibrant movement emerge, is to get people out of the mind-state of animal rights activism is taking out your chequebook and writing a cheque to one of these groups. That's not activism. What activism is, is getting yourself off the couch and talking to your neighbours and your friends and going to places and spreading the message and trying to educate people. Going to other social justice movements and trying to get those folks... I spend a lot of my time talking to people in other dare I say left-wing movements (I've always believed that the animal rights movement is a left-wing movement, and should be a left-wing movement) and I spend a lot of my time talking to people on the left about the importance of seeing the connections. You can be all for social justice and women's rights, but why aren't you also for animal rights? Why do you draw the line? If you believe that these lines are arbitrary with respect to humans, who do

you think that they all of a sudden become non-arbitrary when we erect a species barrier?

If we're ever going to have a vibrant movement, we've really got to get people away from this business that animal rights activism is let me take out my wallet and give you a donation. That's not activism. One of the things that's happened with the emergence of these large organisations is that they infantilize people. They sort of say, "We're the corporation, we know what's best. We'll run the campaigns. What you need to do is come on Thursday nights to our volunteer meetings and stuff envelopes. And make sure you write cheques to us and make sure you get other people to write cheques to us." But we're not training people to be educators and to be activists. I want to be real clear on this: I'm talking about non-violent educational activities. That's the sort of activism I'm talking about. I think education is the most potent form of activism that you can engage in, and we have failed in that. We're not training educators to go out and educate. We have corporations. We don't have an animal rights movement, we have an animal rights industry. You know?

Najda: We have Mark with us as well, who is our technician but he sometimes joins in and co-hosts. He has a question for you.

Mark: Gary, it's very refreshing, what you've been saying so far. I have very similar views; I discuss much with my partner about this whole issue around the animal movement industry.

I know that there's an event that's been going annually for the past few years in Washington D.C., and I noticed there was another big animal rights movement that was organizing, called the Liberation Conference. I think it's supposed to be youth-oriented. It's an animal rights conference, and yet it was really absurd, I felt, when I saw the speakers that were slotted to speak at this event because I felt that it's the same speakers that have been speaking for the past ten years or so. Probably speaking on the same thing, or slightly adjusted talk that was given the year before.

Gary: AR2002, is that what you're talking about?

Mark: Yeah, if you could comment on that. I find the same problem, not just in Washington but in many other conferences. You get the same speakers speaking on the same things. And it even happens here with the Toronto vegetarian annual food fair. I'm very disappointed with it, to put it lightly, because for the past five or ten years, they've been just having the same speakers. You go there to get cheap ice cream sandwiches. (Vegan ones.) That's the main point of going there, rather than to actually see what people are talking about. And not only is it the same speakers,

Gary: It's the same people who attend. [laughs]

Mark: The people who are organizing these events are not putting in the effort that they should be to be more inclusive. There's such a diversity of people who hold these kind of values, and yet they're not making any effort whatsoever to actually try to contact these people. I really wonder why. Maybe they think, "These people are known, so they're popular, so they'll draw people." What's your take on that?

Gary: I agree with you completely. AR2002 for example, these are celebrity events. I used to do these things through the 80s and some of the 90s, and then I just decided that my idea of hell was for eternity, speaking at animal rights conferences with the same people, to the same people. Mark, if you counted the number of vegans who are speaking at AR2002, there wouldn't be many. Basically what you've got is a bunch of welfarists from organizations like HSUS.

The bottom line is, the animal rights movement / industry doesn't want to really shake things up, because if they wanted to shake things up the first thing that's going to go is the corporate structure of new welfarism. These are large organizations where people are knocking down very, very large salaries. Many people in the animal rights movement in the States are making well over \$100,000 in salary, benefits, and in their other things that they get as part of their expense accounts and things like that. Some of those people at HSUS, for example, are making well over \$200,000, and some of them over \$300,000, a year. This is the establishment. PETA is no longer a radical organization; it is part of the establishment. So these organizations are not really interested in shaking things up.

Interestingly, the guy who organizes that conference, AR2002, it was recently revealed that he is also a prominent member of some pro-S&M organization. And I had some discussion with him, in which I said (his name is Alex Hershaff), "Alex, it seems to me that there's a real serious conflict between the position of nonviolence and the position that we ought to be promoting sadomasochistic pornography, basically." And his response was that that's a separate issue. I

don't see it as a separate issue. To me, pornography generally, whether it's sadomasochistic or not, is very similar to eating meat. You reduce the person to body parts, and you consume them. You negate the person through the consumption of body parts.

Mark: I know that that's a popular stance amongst people, but I really have to take issue with that. Just briefly, because I don't want to derail this discussion. The host of this program for the past 5 years, before these two started, was a prostitute for 10 years. Issues around animal rights was actually her greatest passion. I find that a lot of people talk about S&M or prostitution or sex work or pornography without really talking to many people that are in the industry.

Gary: Wait, I actually have given this a lot of thought, and I'm presently writing something about it. I'm not talking about prostitution, I'm talking about men who promote pornography. I'm not talking about women who are in a situation where, economically, the best way they may be able to have independence is to be sex workers. That's a wholly separate issue, and we can discuss that maybe in another show. I'm talking about men promoting pornography. I think that pornography raises some very, very serious issues. If we think that pornography is consistent with the ethic of nonviolence, then where are we going from there? I'm not talking about women who choose to be sex workers. That's a whole other issue. I'm talking about men who promote pornography and the pornography establishment.

That's the sort of conference where, obviously, they don't want people coming there talking about the relationships between sexism and speciesism. If you're running the conference and *you* don't see the relationship between sexism and speciesism, then I suggest that you're not going to be very excited about other people who are talking about that. These are very reactionary, conservative, male-dominated, patriarchally oriented sorts of events, where the same people get together — I agree with you, I used to go to these conferences and it would be the *same people*, conference after conference. I'd speak at maybe eight or nine, maybe ten, twelve conferences a year, and I'd see the same people. And I'd say to them, "Don't you have something better to do than to go to conferences?" And then I thought, I've got something better to do than to come and speak at them, because I'm speaking with the same people, to the same people.

The thing that I was finding, Mark, was I would get up and say, "Abolition is really essential. We've really got to commit ourselves to abolition." And people would give me a standing ovation. The next person would get up and say, "No, we shouldn't promote abolition. It will upset too many people. We all ought to promote welfarist reform." And that person would get a standing ovation. So I decided that obviously I was dealing with a bunch of people who didn't really know what they thought, and however many conferences they went to, they weren't really getting the message.

Those conferences are showcases for the industry leaders. It's really no different from some group of corporate moguls getting together to talk about business. That's exactly what these people are doing. These are events where only the people who are part of the boys' club, who have bought into the idea that we mustn't be too confrontational, we mustn't be too provocative, we mustn't suggest things which are going to offend people. You don't have any progress if you're afraid to risk offending people. I'm not saying you go up and shout at them, I'm not saying that you call them names. Indeed, I'm very much opposed to that. I'm saying that you've got to provoke people in terms of getting them to think about their moral views and the foundations of their moral views. If you're not willing to do that, then you're wasting your time in my view.

I think that a lot of these conferences are doing exactly that. They're trotting out the same people who say the same innocuous things. "We ought to be nice to animals." Well who can disagree with that? That's really a safe thing to say. But again, it doesn't surprise me when you look at the people who organize these things and who speak at these things. These are very reactionary people, people who are generally very conservative in their views. I remember once at an animal rights conference I said to the organizer that I wanted to speak about socialism and animal rights. I wanted to talk about the relationship between economic justice and the economic reasons why we exploit animals. He looked at me and said, "You can't talk about socialism here."

I thought, wow, this is really very interesting. I mean, you can't really understand animal exploitation unless you have some grounding in economics. You can't really understand why we do what we do with animals unless you understand capitalist economics. And to say that that is out of the scope of what we can talk about when we're talking about animal issues suggests to me that people really aren't interested in rethinking questions.

Lauren: It's outrageous.

Gary: It is, I agree with you. Just adding on the thing I was just talking about, a lot of the nasty letters I've gotten over the years have been because I have protested the "I'd rather go naked than wear fur" campaigns. I get letters from people, including a lot of letters from women, saying, "What's wrong with women showing their bodies?" Which of course misses the whole point of what I'm trying to argue. There's a very close relationship between sexism and speciesism, and there's a very close relationship in terms of the fact that we live in a society in which violence has become eroticized. It's not just sadomasochistic pornography, but violence has become eroticized. When you live in a culture in which violence is eroticized, it becomes very difficult to dislodge a lot of the exploitation that affects human and non-humans.

Lauren: Gary, I'm going to have to interrupt you. We're at the end of the hour. It's been fantastic to talk with you.

Najda: Thank you Gary, it's been great talking to you. You're very energized, and we could have talked for another hour. I had lots of questions left, but we'll have to wrap up. Thanks for listening to Animal Voices.

Gary: Thank you for having me on.

