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Gary Francione

Transcript of [interview with Gary Francione](#), Nov. 2 2004. Thanks to Alex Chernavsky for transcribing this show.

Lauren Corman (LC): For people who aren't familiar with Gary Francione, he's a very controversial figure within the animal rights movement. This is a man who basically, as his hobby, makes enemies [laughter]. Yeah, he's just really, a total rabble-rouser. He, I think, frustrates people on all points on the political spectrum in regards to animal issues.

Rob Moore (RM): He's very challenging to the animal rights movement in general, which I think is great. I think a lot of us do a great job of patting ourselves on the back, because I think that's what we need to do. But we also need to have these rabble-rousers who say, "OK, that's great, now, what are we going to do — move forward, concentrate on the issues?"

LC: Yeah, I feel like Gary Francione, with my own research now, going on to seven years, looking at some of these issues, has really haunted me. Things that seemed very straightforward are often derailed by reading something. And I feel like the people who haven't had the chance to look at his work yet, a good place to start is, *Introduction to Animal Rights: Your Child or the Dog* that's responding to that classic question: you're in a burning house and you have to choose between your child or your dog — what would you do? And this is a great book, because in the back in the appendix, which is actually quite large, he goes through and systematically addresses, in a very thorough way, the common questions you would get as a first-time animal rights activist or a vegan. And so, if you're ever at a loss as to how to argue your points, it's a really great place to begin and orient yourself towards a rightist view.

And then, of course, there was the book called *Rain Without Thunder*, which also was a fantastic book. And he has another book called *Animals, Property, and the Law*, which I think was the first one, which is also really good.

So we're excited to have him on, and I'm sure he'll kick our butts today, as well. Thanks for being with us today, Gary.

Gary Francione (GF): Hi, very nice to be with you.

LC: It's nice to have you back on the program. We gave you a lot of questions to look over, and so we're ready to jump into the interview.

GF: It will be nothing short of a minor miracle if we get through a fraction of them. [everyone laughs]

LC: What we're going to do is just talk *really* fast today.

GF: OK, I'm a New Yorker — I can talk really fast.

LC: We were inspired to contact you initially, because we wanted to talk about the foie gras issue. But before we jump into that, we'd like to talk very briefly just about your own political philosophy and orient your listeners to your perspective. And then we'll talk about foie gras, and then come back in and talk about your philosophy in a more in-depth way.

So could you give us a brief introduction to your political view in terms of animal issues?

GF: I am an animal *rights* advocate, and I am an *abolitionist*. So in that sense, I think we should *abolish* animal exploitation and not *regulate* it. And I have for a very long time been a critic of animal *welfare*. I don't think that animal welfare works either in the long term or the short term. For example, in my book, *Rain Without Thunder*, I argued that there was no historical evidence whatsoever to indicate that animal welfare really did much to reduce suffering, and certainly didn't lead, as many animal advocates think — they think that we can pursue

welfarist strategies, or incremental welfarist steps, and we can eventually get to abolition. There is absolutely no historical support for that.

We've had animal welfare for the better part of 200 years now. We're using more animals now and in more horrific ways than at any time in history. So, animal welfare doesn't really lead to animal rights in the long term, and I think that it's problematic to pursue animal welfare with the idea that you can pursue it incrementally and get to abolition.

I don't even think it works in the short term. Let me give you an example. We're going to talk about the California foie gras bill. But let me use a different example that I think illustrates the point well.

There has been a campaign actually all over the place but primarily here in the United States on the part of groups like PETA and people like Peter Singer who have supported the adoption of supposed humane slaughter guidelines by McDonald's. And they praise McDonald's. As a matter of fact, they've made some pretty dramatic statements in favor of McDonald's in talking about what a great organization McDonald's is for adopting these guidelines.

Now, let's assume for a second that if you implemented those guidelines there would be a small reduction in suffering. You could say, well, that's great, there's a small reduction of suffering. However, you have to look at the fact that in the first place, the supposed improvements aren't even being implemented anyway. There's quite a bit of controversy in terms of whether or not the supposed improvements are being implemented. But even if they were, and even if there was some reduction of suffering, you have to look at the fact that animal welfare makes people feel *better* about consuming animals. And I think that one of the things that's happened as a result of PETA's promotion of McDonald's is that there are a lot of people out there who now think that McDonald's treats animals humanely. And so that it's morally better for them to eat McDonald's. So they go to McDonald's.

As a matter of fact, I've talked to a number of people — this is something I'm writing about now — I've been talking to everybody I can about their perception of McDonald's after the PETA campaign. And those people who have paid attention to it, many of them are of the view that it's now a better thing to do to eat McDonald's than it was before, because radical groups — or *supposedly* radical groups like PETA, which is actually very much a welfarist group — that supposedly radical groups are promoting McDonald's and claiming that it now treats animals in a humane way.

So even if there is small reduction of suffering, we would all agree I would suspect that the remaining treatment, you know, the remaining 99% of the treatment, is really quite horrible. And if you're increasing the number of animals that are consumed, because more and more people are going to McDonald's because they think it's a morally better thing to do than it used to be — then aren't you really *increasing* suffering overall? This is one of the short-term (and long-term) problems of animal welfare is that *it makes people feel better about exploiting animals*. And whenever people feel better about that, then they exploit more animals. So even though there might — and I say, "might", because I think most of these measures don't work, *even* to reduce suffering in small amounts — but even if they *did* work to reduce suffering in small amounts, overall I think they have the effect of encouraging people to exploit animals *more*, and that increases suffering. So I think that animal welfare as a strategy is very, very problematic both in terms of the long-term goals of thinking that animal welfare will lead to the abolition of exploitation, and the short-term goal of thinking that animal welfare in the short term will help reduce suffering on the part of at least some animals. And the answer is, that's nonsense.

RM: I think it almost sounds counter-productive to what animal rights people are trying to accomplish.

GF: Well, yes, I think it *is* counter-productive. I think that you can analogize the debate between animal welfare and animal rights to what went on in the 19th century in America in terms of the abolitionists, the people who advocated the abolition of slavery — and the people who advocated regulation. The people who advocated regulation were always frustrated because they said, look, we're proposing legislation that will make slavery more humane, and why won't you support it? Are you in favor of more suffering? And the abolitionist said, no, of course not, we're not in favor of more suffering. We just don't think that the goal ought to be or that we ought to be putting our efforts into making an inherently unjust institution more humane end-quote. We think we ought to be educating the society about *abolishing* slavery.

And we also know who won that debate, by the way. And it wasn't the abolitionists who were being unrealistic. It was really in very many ways the regulationists.

But I do think that there is a real serious inconsistency between animal welfare and animal rights. And I think that it is counter-productive, both in a practical sense... Frequently, people say, well, you know, you make theoretical arguments. And the answer is, wait a minute. I'm talking about *strategy* here, as well as theory. Yes, I do care about morality, so I do care about moral theory. Yes, I do, I confess to that, I'm sorry, I'm guilty of that. But I *also* care about strategy and tactics, and I don't see great... it's not that I'm having to confront a massive number of great animal welfare victories that arguably might lead to the significant reduction and perhaps even the exploitation of animal suffering. Quite the contrary. All I see is a lot of nonsense campaigns that really don't amount to a hill of beans, and it seems to me that, if anything, things are getting worse and not better.

RM: So more on that later. Now that we've had a brief introduction to who you are and what you stand for, let's talk about the foie gras bill in California. The sale of and production is going to be banned in 2012, recently signed by Governor Schwarzenegger. Farm Sanctuary is holding a celebration to honor Governor Schwarzenegger and Senator Burton on November 17, hosted by a number of celebrities. And many animal advocates are actually celebrating this bill. But Gary, you have come out *against* this. Could you tell us why?

GF: I think that the bill you are referring to is an example of an extremely problematic phenomenon in the movement that's embracing of legislation that really is not only not helping animals but is harming them. I think that 1520 [Senate Bill 1520 is the designation of the California foie gras bill that was signed into law on September 29, 2004] is bad for both practical and theoretical reasons. Let's talk about the practical reasons first.

There is one major producer, one producer in California, that makes this stuff — Sonoma. Basically, the law explicitly immunizes Sonoma until the year 2012 against any criminal or civil actions. And indeed there *was* a civil action that was pending against Sonoma, in which the litigants were seeking to have the practice declared in violation of the state anti-cruelty law. We don't know whether that lawsuit would have worked or would *not* have worked, but the point is that we'll never know now, because the bill has the effect of dismissing the lawsuit and immunizing Sonoma until 2012. So basically it's protecting Sonoma from any civil or criminal action until 2012.

Now, what's very interesting was that I wrote some comments about 1520 that I sent to some organizations that asked my opinion about 1520. And I wrote those comments on October 7th, and they were distributed on the Internet, apparently, which was fine — I didn't mind. And one of the things that I said in that message was that 1520 would allow Sonoma to use the next eight years to do experiments aimed at showing that the practice of force-feeding was humane, so that the law would be repealed and never come into effect. Well, I got a number of very hostile e-mails and phone messages from various animal advocates who objected to any and all of the comments I made about 1520. But in particular, they were concerned that I claimed that the ban would never come into effect, and that there was a significant chance that it would be repealed. And what is interesting to me is that on October 27th — three weeks after I wrote my comments — the *San Jose Mercury News* in California reported, and I quote this from the article, "The University of California at Davis has been working behind the scenes with the Governor's Office to put a plan into place that would allow the university's Animal Science department and the Veterinary Medical School to conduct research to determine whether foie gras production is humane. If that research indicates that the process is humane, it could be used as ammunition to challenge the law." And then the article is quite a lengthy article, but one of the other statements in there is, "Even in his signing message, Governor Schwarzenegger left open the possibility that the law might never take effect". So basically, what I wrote on the 7th of October, that the law was an open invitation to conduct experiments that would be geared to show... and we all know, if the University of California at Davis puts enough time and effort into this, you know, you can prove just about anything.

As a matter of fact, I've seen some comments from various people already that they think that this process may *look* horrible, but really doesn't cause any pain or distress to the birds. So, you know, I think there's a very good chance... as a matter of fact, I will be willing to bet a dollar, and not a *Canadian* dollar, a *US* dollar, and that has a lot of value, you know [all laugh]... I would be willing to bet a US dollar with anybody who thinks that this thing is *ever* going to come into effect. I think that's extremely unlikely. And I think that the bill is highly problematic because what it's done now is it makes it impossible if a prosecutor came along that was interested in prosecuting this practice as violative of California law, she can't do it, because there's an immunity, in essence, protecting Sonoma from any civil or criminal liability. If someone wanted to bring a lawsuit, which you can in California, you can bring civil lawsuits. California, unlike many states, permits citizens to bring suits seeking a declaration that a

practice violates the state anti-cruelty law, can't do it, because now Sonoma is immunized. Which is why, by the way, Sonoma supported this legislation. And Sonoma was very *happy* with this legislation, because basically it gives them eight years where nobody can touch them. If animal advocates think that that's a victory, my God, I mean [chuckles]...

LC: OK, I just wanted to ask... those people, you know, that we've talked to and people working on the front lines of this issue that *are* celebrating this as a victory, you know, what do you say to them? Are they delusional? Have they just not...?

GF: Look, animal rights in America, I can't speak to the movement in other countries as much as I can here, but it's a business. And in order for these groups to raise the funds that they raise, and let us not kid ourselves. Take a look at the 990s of most of these large organizations — it's phenomenal how much money they bring in. And, the way that they do that is they sell campaigns. I mean, you know, it's obvious that if you want to do a lot of fundraising you have to be able to go to the public and say, "Here are victories, you know, and the situation is bad, but we've got victories". And that's what this is about. I mean, this is fundraising. It doesn't surprise me. As a matter of fact it would shock me if they *weren't* having fundraisers around this. But I mean ultimately this is a fundraising tool. And so, you know, I don't think it's a question of being delusional. I think they understand *exactly* what's going on, but you know, they're raising money. And, you know, you raise money by going to people and saying, "Look at the *tremendous* victory that we have, and we're responsible for it." As a matter of fact, you've now got five different groups running around — even more, perhaps — saying, "This is our victory. And please give us money". So, I mean, it doesn't surprise me. I mean, this happens all the time.

RM: So Gary, I believe, and correct me if I'm wrong, I think this is the first actual legislation that defines a factory farming practice as inhumane. Is that not a good thing?

GF: Well, look, you've got to balance benefits with costs. I think any benefit here is very slight and speculative, and the costs are really quite certain. Sonoma's protected, and a lot of animals are going to suffer in order to "prove" that force-feeding does not make animals suffer. And I don't think that things are ever going to come into effect in the first place. And I also think there's a really serious *moral* cost in this, in that this sends out a message, just like you know, you're saying, "Well, doesn't this legislation send out a message?", and the answer is, "Yeah, it may send out a message". You have to balance it against what negative effects it's going to have. But it's also sending out another message, and the other message is that if these animals weren't force-fed, raising them and slaughtering them and eating them would be a morally all right, or at least, a better thing to do.

Here's a quote from the *New York Times* article on this bill. Some animal advocate named Paul Waldow said, "A certain segment of the population is beginning to consume with conscience". Now I think that sends out a very, very bad message. The idea that animal people are making the statement that, "Well, this is a good thing, because it means that people are consuming with conscience." What does that logically say to people? It says that, you know, well, if you tinker at the edges, and you don't do some of these really grotesque things, it's all right to raise and slaughter and kill animals. And the answer is, I think that's a very, very distressing and problematic message to be sending out. So, you know, to the extent that, does the bill have a positive message, and the answer is, well, to the extent that it does, you've got to balance it against the things that you know are negative about it, namely its immunization of Sonoma for the next eight years, the fact that it's going to protect some really probably very gruesome experiments intended to show that this process is really OK, and that ultimately it's going to end up not being implemented. And it sends out the message that we can be quote compassionate consumers, you know, "slavery light" is really OK, you know. We object to slavery, but "slavery light" is OK. I think that's a problematic message, and when you balance any benefit of this thing, with the detriment, I think the detriment really outweighs it.

LC: Gary, we had Steven Best on a while ago, and we were talking about the welfare vs. rights debate, and on and on, and he was talking a bit about reforms vs. welfare initiatives, and I wanted to talk with you about that some more, but just on a practical sense, let's say you're an activist that's particularly concerned with the foie gras issue. Gary, where would you start?

RM: And how would you have handled the motion of this bill differently?

GF: Well, first of all, let me say, I mean, I disagree very strongly with Steve Best. Steve Best talks about why welfare is problematic on one hand, and then on the other hand he says, well, animal welfare, as long as it's coupled with abolitionist rhetoric may be OK. And I think that that's really problematic. I think that that's

what the groups *do* these days, you know, they pursue welfarism primarily, and while out of one side of their mouth they talk about abolition. And I don't think it's getting us very far. But let me say this — I think that we're setting up a false dichotomy by saying, well, if we don't pursue welfare, then we don't do anything. And I think that the groups try to set up this dichotomy. They say we either have to pursue welfare, or we abandon animals and we just basically, you know, let them suffer. And the answer is, that's nonsense. We have limited time and we have limited resources. We would all agree with that, I suspect. And we have choices to make. And the choice is not between welfare and nothing. It's between welfare and pursuing non-welfarist, abolitionist campaigns.

Let me give you an example of what I'm talking about. I have argued, for example, that if ten years ago, we put all of our time, energy, and resources into a sustained campaign promoting veganism, ten years later we would surely have at least 10,000 more vegans. I think that's a fairly non-controversial proposition. I don't think you would disagree with me there — that we would have at least 10,000. We'd probably have many, many more. If all of the groups, and all the animal advocates *really* put their effort behind educating the public about the moral and other issues, moral, health, environmental issues involved in veganism — if they *really* did that, I think that we would all agree that we'd end up with *at least* 10,000 more vegans today than we had.

Now, it is my view that if had 10,000 more vegans, we would reduce animal suffering far more than we had reduced animal suffering with all the measures, all of these welfarist measures that we pursued. So, there is a *choice* there. It's not just a question of you either do welfare or you do nothing. I would maintain that if we're really concerned about reducing suffering, we could do that consistent with an abolitionist agenda. We could do that consistent with an abolitionist principle — and probably reduce suffering far more. I think 10,000 more vegans would result not only in the reduction of more suffering, but would result in greater social change, which is *really, people, what we need*. The reason why the movement is failing, and the reason why the movement, is in my judgment, a *pathetic failure*, is that we have failed to *educate* people about what it is that we believe and why they should believe it as well. And the reason why we have failed is because education is not something you can, you know, it's hard to fundraise to have educational initiatives — it's very difficult for the groups to do that. So they turn to these welfarist campaigns because they're much easier to package and fundraise from. But education is not something you can fundraise off as easily. But I think that's what we ought to be pursuing. And the idea that if we don't do welfare, we don't do anything, that's nonsense. That's a false dichotomy that the large organizations set up because it is in *their* interests to have these welfarist campaigns as commodities that they can sell to people, that they can fundraise off of. Because they don't want to do the hard work of education. Education is harder to raise money for, and you do run the risk when you educate people that some people who don't want to hear the message... The more radical your message is, the more you tell people, "Look, you really ought not... it's not a question of whether you should give up meat, there's more suffering in a glass of milk than there is in a pound of steak, so yes, just give it up all. If you really care about suffering, you really ought to give it up all." Are you going to turn some people off if you say that? Are you going to turn some people off if you say that veganism is a moral baseline of our movement? You might turn *some* off, but you might also attract a lot of people who *see things more clearly*, who get the message because the message is a *clear* message. I think that the animal movement, particularly in North America, is so confused and confusing that the public doesn't really understand *what* its position is. I mean, you've got a lot of people out there who think that PETA's position is that it's fine to go and eat at McDonald's. And one level, you know, I mean...

RM: ... and at Burger King

GF: ... exactly, and, Burger King. And on one level it *is*. So, I think we really have to get away from this false dichotomy of *welfare* or *nothing*. Because that's a dichotomy that the groups have an incentive to promote, but it's a false choice. There are *other* things that we can do. So it's not just a question of pursuing welfarist measures or abandoning the animals. If we really care about this, when we really care about *ending* exploitation than just making slavery more humane, making exploitation more humane, I think that we need to get our campaigns in line with those principles.

LC: So it sounds like you're advocating, then, some kind of concerted alliance-building, some kind of coalition-building. How do you envision that happening if these groups that you're talking about are fairly entrenched in terms of their strategies? I guess this is sort-of a two-part question. How do we go about bringing people together and working in a more-focused way toward raising awareness about veganism? And, in particular, are there any groups right now that you see doing things that we should be doing more of, that you like?

GF: I think part of the problem is that the movement has never really embraced

veganism as a moral baseline. So I think that's the first problem. When I talk about veganism, I talk about veganism as applying the principle of abolition to one's personal life — one's *individual* life. That, you know, if you say that you're an abolitionist, then you're committed to veganism. It's not an option, it's not a diet choice — you're committed to that. Just as if in the 19th century, you were an abolitionist, that meant you didn't have any slaves. And if you were a slave-owner who said you were an abolitionist, that was a somewhat peculiar position. There were some people who took that position, and they were criticized very much for being hypocrites, and I think rightly so. And I think that part of the problem is then because the movement wants to be this "big tent" phenomenon, and make sure that it can have as many people as possible as a fundraising base, it doesn't really want to promote veganism in a systematic way, and in a strong way, because that may turn some people off. So I think part of the problem has been it's not just that the groups are entrenched, in terms of their individual existence, and they don't want to get together and promote the common goals of veganism, they don't *have* common goals of veganism. I think that's the first problem. And, that's the first problem. The reason why we have a welfare movement is because there's still a movement which is basically saying, well, you should try to be nice to animals, but if you feel the need to eat cheese pizza or ice cream or the odd piece of fish or whatever, that's not morally objectionable. And I think that that's a *problem*.

Are there some groups that are departing from that paradigm? Most of the groups recognize, I think, that in order to bring in the big dollars they have to peddle a very moderate and confused set of principles. There are some groups out there, I think, that are trying. What I do, and what I encourage other people to do is look at what's going on in your local area. And, rather than look to national organizations, try to change things where you live.

For example, where a lot of my time, energy, and money goes — I help people who do trap-neuter-releasing. Because I think that's important. There are individual animals out there that need help. I don't think we should be *breeding* dogs and cats for companionship. And I look forward to a day — I won't be on the planet, but maybe I'll be here in another body — where there *aren't* any dogs or cats. I don't think we should have them. But while they *are* here, I think we have an obligation to take care of them, and to do our best to deal with them as individuals. I really respect the work of a lot of these TNR people who are working in relative anonymity using their own resources doing very, very difficult work. And I support them.

I also support people who run no-kill shelters and who are advocating spaying and neutering. They're not killing animals that they have, and they're trying to get them placed. I think that's important. It's important to take care of the animals that are here *now*.

So that's what I do. In my area, I look for people who are doing those sorts of things, and those are the sorts of people I support. I think by and large in the overwhelming number of cases a dollar sent to one of these large animal organizations is a dollar better flushed down the toilet or something. I don't think it does a heck of a lot of good. I think that these organizations are very wealthy, and I think that they are entrenched in terms of the reactionary positions that they take. And I think that if we look to them to change society and to change social thinking about the animal issues, we are wasting our time.

LC: However, dollars going to Animal Voices will be spent really well. [laughter]

GF: I actually think that shows like this, it's very important because you're reaching a lot of people. The organized animal groups engage in censorship that is really somewhat extraordinary. It sort of reminds one of Stalinist Russia. The organized animal groups are not in favor of promoting discussion and debate about these issues. As a matter of fact, the movement is — at least in one of its manifestations — this conglomeration of large, sort-of corporate animal welfare organizations. And I would include PETA in that as well. I mean, they're not interested in fostering discussions.

As a matter of fact, all you have to do is disagree with these people, and you immediately get labeled. I know this from personal experience, people. You know, if you disagree with these people, you get labeled as divisive. And they're not interested at all in discussing your position. There's no discussion that goes on. And I think the only hope, frankly, is alternative media. Because this is true even of *Animals' Agenda*, which was a magazine that, thank God, closed two years ago here in the States. That was true of *Agenda*. I mean, *Agenda* censored things horribly and would not permit certain points of view to be expressed. Other magazines out there — *Satya* is one — just about all of them that I can think of, not that there are that many anymore — just about all of them that I can think of are magazines that really censor particular points of view. And I'm interested in fomenting trouble [laughs] in terms of fostering discussion. And I think that it's alternative media, like this show, because I'm familiar with some of

the other... I mean, I'm familiar with what you all do. And you are trying to foster discussions, and I think that that's really important. Because if you have discussions, let people make their own choices. The problem is the movement doesn't want the discussion in the first place. They're interested in marginalizing those people who disagree. And they're very good at doing that, because they control the outlets.

RM: Gary, we're going to quote you on that, and you're going to be part of our new introduction. I just want to get one thing clear. Do you support the single-issue initiatives to the government, like the foie gras bill, or veal legislation? Or do you support more campaigning to the public for veganism as a more powerful tool?

GF: The latter. In *Rain Without Thunder*, I argued that there might be some welfarist reforms that were potentially useful, prohibitions that recognize that animals have certain interests that couldn't be sacrificed even if it redounded to the detriment of human animal owners. I spent the last the last third of that book talking about welfarist measure that might be more effective. But the problem is that animals are property. And as long as they're property, there is going to be a really built-in resistance to recognizing that animals have any significant interests, because they *are* property.

Once you call something "property", talking about something as property with interests that have to be respected causes a dissonance in the legislative and judicial mind, because it's property — it only has the value that we give to it. And it's exclusively a means to our end. So I think that pursuing welfarist measures is by and large not a good thing to do. And given that we have choices, we can say right now, OK, we want to do something to reduce suffering. Do we put our time and our energy into a welfarist measure, or do we put our time and efforts into educating people? And should we go to the government and say, let's have some legislation on force-fed birds, or veal calves, or whatever, or do we spend the amount of time that we're going to spend lobbying, and what-not, and the amount of money that we're going to spend, and all the energy, the time, energy, and resources that we're going to spend, should we devote that to educating people about not eating those products? In my judgment, I think you can achieve the goal of reducing suffering more effectively by doing the latter, which I think is also consistent with the principles of abolition. Whereas the former, I think, is *less* effective and *inconsistent* with the principles of abolition.

You can't look at it as an "either-or" situation — that you either do one, or you do nothing. It's a question of *what* you're going to do. See, I think these things are almost always corrupted, like the foie gras legislation.

Another example of that out in California, with the same group — Farm Sanctuary — was the downed animal law. The downed animal law — I think it's ridiculous. It does *nothing*. The most compelling proof that it does nothing is the fact that the animal industry out in California supported the bill. And they supported the bill because A) it did nothing, and B), it gave them good PR. You know, they were doing something really "good". And it made people feel more comfortable. As a matter of fact, there was a press conference — I discuss it in *Rain Without Thunder*. There was a press conference where the people from Farm Sanctuary said that the downed animal act would make people feel *better* about the products of the slaughterhouse. You have the animal people busy promoting a law like that, claiming that people are going to feel better about eating meat. I mean, is that an initiative anybody should be supporting? And the answer is no. There are a lot of animal advocates in this country who think that that was a great victory. I think it was *ridiculous*. It was a great victory for the animal industry out in California. It wasn't a great victory for the animals.

So I think that these things end up being corrupted. The initial legislation that Farm Sanctuary proposed was stronger than what was eventually passed. Because the problem is is that you propose something, and it gets watered-down, as in the case with this foie gras legislation.

LC: Gary, I'm currently a student in environmental studies here in Toronto. And I'm really actively involved and know a lot of people that are really into the environmental movement. And one of the things about veganism that's often people sort of ply into to me, so, OK, so you're advocating veganism, so you think that going to the store and buying your mono-cultured GMO soy product and wrapping it in three layers of plastic, and then buying it from "Lowblows" is, uh, or Loblaws here is really decreasing suffering in any way. And so, yeah, I might be getting my free-range eggs from some very small, family-run business, and who's to say that my choice is causing more suffering than a vegan walking into some corporate store and buying something that's coming out of a really gross industrial-agricultural system?

GF: If where that's going is capitalism is a big problem, you ain't gonna get an argument out of me. I mean... [chuckles]. I think that there are all sorts of

problems with the harm that these large corporate enterprises cause in various ways. But I still think that there's a difference between... it's like, it's not the same thing, but it's *like* when people say to me, well, if everybody ate plants, and we planted more crops, animals would get killed when we planted crops. And the answer is well yeah, I guess that's true, but it's like saying that, when you build a road you know that people will travel on that road at a particular speed, and so there are going to be a certain number of fatalities every year. Is there a difference between building a road and going and killing people — singling out individual people and killing them? And the answer is yes, of course there is.

So are there going to be some unintended consequences of certain lifestyle choices that we make? And the answer is yeah, there will be some unintended consequences, but that doesn't mean that that's the same thing as going out and killing and eating individual animals. I mean, it's tough.

Obviously, there will be a harm to any choice that we make. If you wear non-leather clothing, and you're wearing a synthetic that may be made with some petroleum product, is there a harm involved in making a petroleum product? Yes. But is there a difference between buying something that is the result of a process in which there may have been harm, and buying a leather product? And the answer is yes, and we all recognize that.

And I don't care who it is, no-one would argue that there isn't a difference between a lampshade that is made out of a petroleum product, where workers may have been injured on the North Sea oil rigs in the production of the petroleum, and a lampshade that was made from the skin of somebody killed in a concentration camp. We all see that there's a *difference* there. Obviously, you try to do as little harm as possible. And we should all be moving in that direction. And the world, for reasons not only of morality but of *survival*, ought to be moving in this direction of doing less harm and causing less harm in all of its choices. But that doesn't mean that unintended harm, or harm that results from processes that one chooses because they are less harmful ultimately to individual animals than more harmful. But that doesn't mean there's no difference between the *unintended* harm that results and the *intended* harm that results. I think that there are real serious differences between those choices.

One of the things that I find very distressing is this: I have a lot of friends who consider themselves really radical, deep ecologists. And they eat meat or animal products. And I just *do not understand that*. I just don't understand it. It completely bewilders me. Even if you don't care at all about animals, animal-based agriculture is destroying the planet. And I don't know any ecologist who doesn't at least *in theory* accept it. What I find odd is that although it's accepted in theory, a lot of these folks continue to eat animal products. I really don't understand it. And it may be that it's just the phenomenon that many people just don't take seriously what they *say* they take seriously. Maybe that's it — I don't know.

RM: I don't get that either, and that really disturbs me. Meat-eating environmentalists — I *don't get it*. And Lauren has said in her Environmental Studies — I'm sorry, I don't mean to bring in anecdotes from your life, Lauren [both laugh] — I said, "Oh, I'll do that program. It will be great to be surrounded by so many other vegans." And she said, "Well, actually, I think I'm the only one".

LC: Well, there's actually a few. I should say that Environmental Studies has been very good to me. They let me study what I want to study, and they've been very supportive. But yeah, it is frustrating, the frameworks don't always work together. Gary, I have to say that your work has haunted me for a long time, which is good. But I wanted to ask you a question that kind of lingers...

GF: That's an interesting word, "haunting". [both laugh] In what sense have I *haunted* you?

LC: Because nothing is easy anymore.

RM: I dressed up as you for Halloween.

GF: Ah, OK. [laughter]

LC: Nothing is easy anymore, which is good. But one of the things that sort of lingers in the back of my mind and bothers me is that in terms of taking veganism as a baseline...

GF: Yeah

LC: ...I'm often asked questions like this: What are you saying, as a white westerner, about other cultures? Are you saying that people in the Sudan... are you saying that nomadic peoples wherever shouldn't be able to have their cattle?

By making some kind of assertion for veganism, are you basically just continuing kind of a colonial mentality, telling other people how they should live in other parts of the world?

GF: Well, let me say this. It reminds of an experience I had in your country some years ago, when I was first getting involved with this. I was giving a talk up in Toronto, and I was really new at this. And a guy stood up, and he said, "I'm an Inuit, and we use animals for purposes that go back a long time, and it's a cultural thing. How can you purport to address what we do? Do you think that what we do is immoral? And how do you justify commenting on it?"

We were talking about killing seals as I recall, and I said well, yeah, I *do* think it's immoral. And I said, and here's my analysis of the justification. If you were engaging in child sacrifice because it was something that you culturally had done — and some societies have done that, they've engaged in human sacrifice — I said, do you think that it would be morally justifiable for an outsider to criticize what you're doing? And he said, "Yes, absolutely". And said, well then we both agree that it's all right for outsiders to criticize what you do. It's a question we disagree about what triggers that criticism.

To me this is no different from people who say, well, do you think it's all right for Westerners to talk about clitorectomies in Africa? And the answer is, you *bet* I do. I mean, I think it's wrong, and I don't care what anybody says about it. Now having said that, I don't spend a whole lot of my time talking about people in the Sudan, except it concerns me what's going on there, but I mean I don't spend a whole lot of time focusing on what Inuits do in the North, or what goes on in some of the tribes in Africa, because what I'm dealing with is a movement in North America where everybody can easily be a vegan, and most of them *aren't*.

Yes, I think that genital mutilation is really bad. I think it's perfectly all right to say that. Where am I going to spend my time, given that I have a limited time on the planet? If I'm concerned about those sorts of issues, there's a heck of a lot of abuse of women that goes on in my society. I don't think that what goes on with these genital mutilations in Africa and some of the Middle Eastern countries — I don't think it's a good idea. I think it's morally wrong. But there's a lot I can focus on right here. Now, we have spousal abuse and rape. Still, despite the fact that we don't talk about it much anymore, rape is still a major problem in this society. And the attitudes towards rape are still a major problem in this society.

So, do I think it continues colonialism? No, I believe that violence is wrong no matter where violence manifests itself. I view that as an objective moral truth. Violence is wrong. And so in that sense I don't see it as continuing cultural imperialism. I don't see it as cultural imperialism at all.

LC: I have a friend here in the studio, and he was real excited that I would ask this question. We were wondering if you could answer why are you vegan, to somebody if you have a minute to do it, and you want to pique their interest? What do you say?

GF: I'm a vegan, because I object to suffering. Because I think that it is wrong to inflict suffering in any circumstance, but *particularly* where it's not necessary. And *nobody* maintains that it is necessary to eat animal products to lead an optimally-healthy lifestyle, and indeed an increasing number of mainstream healthcare people think that it's *bad* for us to eat animals. And the best justification we have for eating animals is that we enjoy the *taste* of animals. And I do not believe that pleasure is enough of a justification for death and for the infliction of gross suffering. I don't even think you need a complicated theory of rights in that respect. I argue in *Introduction to Animal Rights*, you don't need a theory of rights to rule out 99% of what we're doing with animals. All you have to do is take seriously the principle of unnecessary suffering, that it's wrong to inflict suffering on any sentient being without a very good reason. And pleasure, amusement, or convenience do not constitute compelling reasons.

How's that? Was that under a minute? I didn't time it.

RM: That was very good. In the couple of minutes that we have left, I was hoping you could comment on your new book and what you'll be focusing that on. And I know you wanted to comment a bit on the guardian campaign and a couple other issues.

GF: Yeah, what I'm going to be focusing on in the book is the fact that since I wrote, *Animals, Property, and the Law* ten years ago, the law really hasn't changed in any significant way whatsoever. Despite all of these welfarist campaigns, we are no further ahead than we were ten years ago, when I first made the argument that animal welfare doesn't work. We haven't gotten any further. But I'm also talking about other things. I'm talking about the problems with violence in the movement, and why animal advocates ought to reject violence. And I'm talking about the relationship...

RM: [interrupts] So, I'm sorry, what do you mean by violence in the movement?

GF: I'm talking about campaigns — for example, the Huntingdon campaign has had some, to me, deeply disturbing aspects to it. I don't believe that we should be calling people's homes and harassing children or spouses or things like that. I just don't think that's a good idea. I don't think it's a good idea to assault people. I just don't think that those sorts of things are morally justifiable, nor do I think that they're a strategically good thing to do. And it's alarming to me that there are folks out there who are strongly in support of that sort of thing. It just doesn't make any sense to me. Part of what I'm going to be doing is explaining *why* I think that is not a good way to go.

And I also want to talk about violence in a different way. That is, I think a lot of these campaigns that groups like PETA and other organizations promote that are sexist are *violent*. And I think that continuing to encourage people to treat other humans as outside, or not full members of the moral community, and that as long as we continue doing that, we're going to continue to place animals outside the moral community.

And I will talk about the guardian campaign that you mentioned. I think that that's another example of let's package it, let's sell it, it's a great fund-raiser. And it is. I'm not disputing at all that the animal rights movement, or whatever you want to call it, at least in the United States, is *tremendous* in terms of its entrepreneurial skills. Not much more, but it's *very good* in terms of its entrepreneurial skills. And I think the guardian campaign is an excellent example.

I don't care whether you call me a guardian, or whether you call me a giraffe, or whether you call me a rock, it doesn't really matter *what* you call me. If I have the ability to take my healthy dog to a vet and say, "kill this dog", I don't really care *what* you want to call me.

And I think the guardian campaign is, again, smoke and mirrors. It's something you can package, it's something you can fund-raise off of. Ultimately, I don't think it makes a bit of difference.

People who have companion animals that they live with and love, and that they treat as individuals who are sentient, with all sorts of cognitive abilities and what-not, they regard... I have six rescued animals. I had seven, but one died a short time ago. But I have six dogs that were rescued. One was rescued from the streets. The others were all on death row at the local shelter. I certainly regard myself as their guardian. I don't need anybody to *tell* me that. I don't need a campaign. People who have companion animals who take them seriously already regard themselves as guardians. And those who don't, don't really *care* about campaigns like that. And I don't really think it's going to do very much to change things. Although it will be useful for raising money amongst people who consider themselves guardians. Some people think that's a great idea. But again, I think that's another example of a campaign where you can package it, you can sell it. But in the end, what's it doing? In my view, not a heck of a lot.

RM: Gary, we are out of time. But I want to thank you for your challenging and enlightening perspective. It's always a joy to speak with you.

LC: Yeah, it really is. Thanks a lot, Gary.

GF: Hey, thank you very much for having me. And I hope to be back again. Take care, bye bye.

LC: You've been listening to Animal Voices CIUT 89.5 FM. If you have questions or comments for us, or anything you wanted to give us feedback about, you can write us at animalvoices@gmail.com. And Rob, I just want to say thanks for setting up that interview. It was great.

RM: My pleasure.

LC: And thanks for Zeva and Lamia for being in the studio today.

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