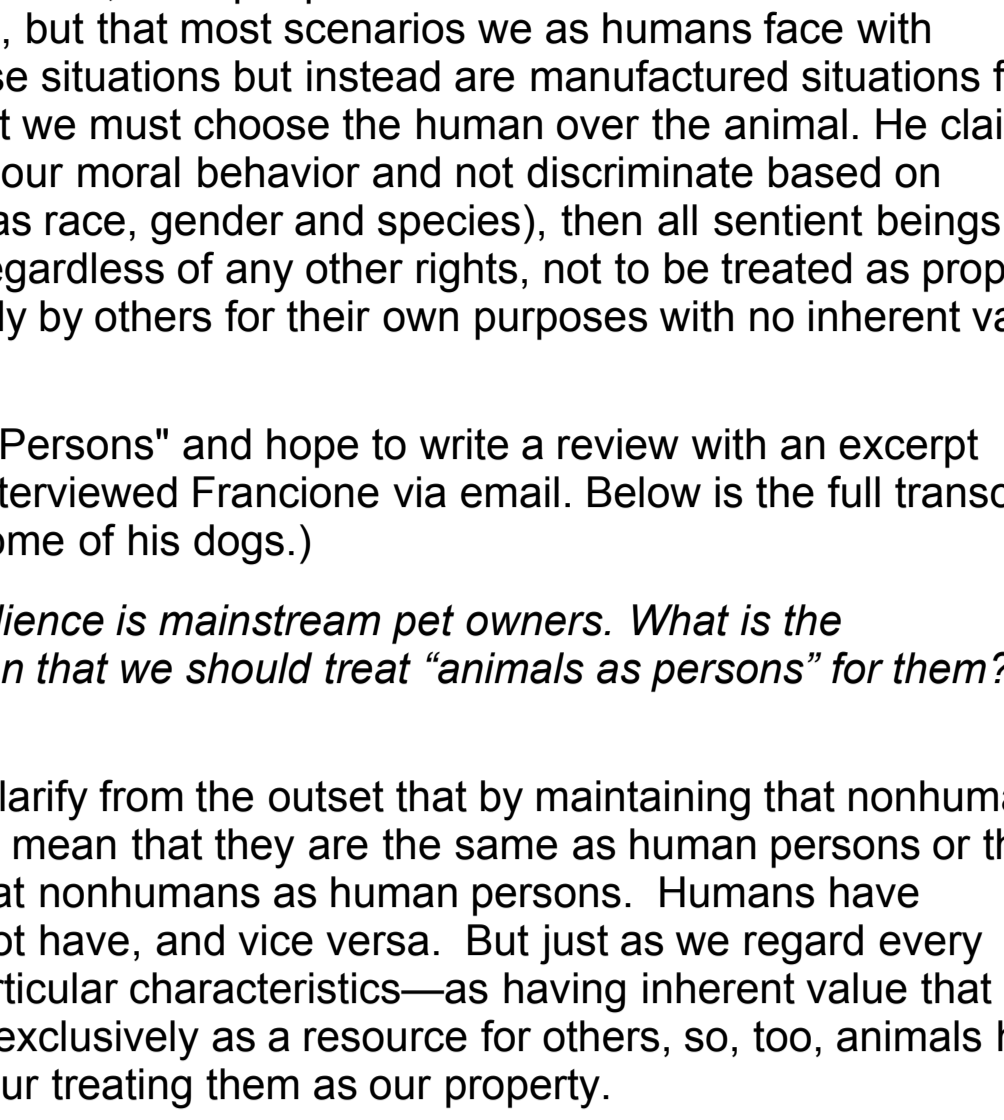


Mostly Dogs This is a discussion forum for those who consider animals part of the family. The easy address for its main page is RGJ.com/mostlydogs.

Post a comment below or email me at mostlydogs@rgj.com. All correspondence is considered for publication unless explicitly requested otherwise.

Interview with Gary Francione about animals as persons Posted by MarkRobison at 8/13/2008 11:57 AM PDT

Gary Francione's latest book came out earlier this summer, and it's called "Animals as Persons: Essays on the Abolition of Animal Exploitation."



One of his primary theories -- and I hope I can describe it accurately -- is the burning-house situation. If a dog and a child are in a burning house, whom do you save?

Francione's theory is that, in general, most people will save the human and that this is understandable and defensible, but that most scenarios we as humans face with animals are NOT burning-house situations but instead are manufactured situations for our benefit where we claim that we must choose the human over the animal.

I recently finished "Animals as Persons" and hope to write a review with an excerpt soon. But in the meantime, I interviewed Francione via email. Below is the full transcript. (The photo shows Gary with some of his dogs.)

MOSTLY DOGS: My main audience is mainstream pet owners. What is the consequence of your contention that we should treat "animals as persons" for them?

GARY FRANCIONE: Let me clarify from the outset that by maintaining that nonhuman animals are "persons," I do not mean that they are the same as human persons or that we are morally obligated to treat nonhumans as human persons.

We may as a matter of personal choice attach a higher value to our companion animals, such as dogs and cats, but as far as the law is concerned, even these animals are nothing more than commodities.

My guess is that most of your readers probably do value their nonhuman companions as family members and think of them as nonhuman persons.

The central argument in my book is that we have no moral justification for treating any sentient nonhuman as a commodity that exists for us to exploit.

MOSTLY DOGS: You have a number of animals in your life. Tell us a little about them and how you approach your relationship with them as far as care, feeding and training based on your view of animals as persons.

GARY FRANCIONE: We presently have five rescued dogs; we have had as many as seven at one time. They are members of our family. We love them and we do whatever we can to promote their well-being.

As far as feeding is concerned, we are all vegans in this house. We generally feed the dogs a homemade mixture of organic grains, legumes, and vegetables to which we add a vegan vitamin blend and yeast.

As far as training is concerned, when we need to use training methods, we never employ any methods that are negative or that involve physical force of any sort.

MOSTLY DOGS: Some would say that there's hypocrisy in you gaining so much from your relationship with your companion animals -- and with you capable of interacting with them in a way that does not treat them like property -- yet you want future generations to be denied this experience and you seem to imply that they're incapable of treating cats and dogs in the way that you treat yours.

GARY FRANCIONE: You have raised a number of issues here. First of all, let me describe briefly my view about the moral status of the institution of "pet" ownership.

However, my view is that domestication itself is morally problematic apart from the matter of how humans actually treat nonhumans.

You ask: "And if cats and dogs breed naturally without any help from us and are not treated as property, what would be wrong with people allowing some to share their lives?"

You claim that people will not even consider animal rights because they disagree with my views on domestication, which they will treat as a "deal breaker."

Actually, I think that if we recognized that veganism was a moral imperative, we would have no problem in seeing that the institution of domestication was inherently problematic irrespective of how well we treated our nonhuman companions.

MOSTLY DOGS: Nicholas Kristof recently wrote a piece in the New York Times about how Proposition 2 on the ballot in California is a major gain for animal rights.

GARY FRANCIONE: I can provide for you a portion of what I wrote on Mr. Kristof's blog: "Proposition 2 is most ill-advised.

Indeed, these sorts of 'reforms' arguably increase animal suffering and death by making people feel better about consuming animals and increasing consumption.

MOSTLY DOGS: The most compelling and interesting part of your new book "Animals as Persons," for me, was the part where you dissected the biggest "victories" by animal groups such as PETA and the Humane Society of the United States and you revealed how these legislative victories in fact strengthen the ways that humans hurt animals.

GARY FRANCIONE: I personally do not contribute to any of the large animal groups. I think that these groups do more harm than good for the most part and most of them already have millions.

The best way to help animals is to stop participating directly in animal exploitation. Do your part to lower demand by going vegan.

MOSTLY DOGS: You often write about how speciesism is an arbitrary form of discrimination that can't be morally justified, similar to racism and sexism.

GARY FRANCIONE: You have not stated my position accurately. In Introduction to Animal Rights: Your Child or the Dog?, I argue that even if we would always choose for whatever reason to save the human in an emergency situation involving a human and a nonhuman in which we could save only one, that would still not justify treating nonhumans as things.

MOSTLY DOGS: A reader wrote in saying that allowing a cat to live by feeding her food made from fish is speciesist. He wanted to know why it wasn't hypocritical to kill hundreds of fish to save one cat's life if speciesism is truly something to stamp out.

We're not going to stamp out speciesism by killing the cat either. I do not think that we should feed animals to other animals. Our dogs are all healthy vegans.

MOSTLY DOGS: My wife and I run a small sanctuary for rescued farm animals. Flies bother the donkeys, so we set out traps that kill hundreds upon hundreds of flies each summer.

GARY FRANCIONE: I do not know enough about flies and donkeys to know how to advise you here. You say that sprays don't work but I know other people who have rescued donkeys who claim that sprays do work.

MOSTLY DOGS: Question 8 reminds me of a passage in your book "Introduction to Animal Rights" where you say that people always ask about insects with the implication being that since it's hard to draw the line of which animal species deserve rights, none deserves rights.

GARY FRANCIONE: I do not know if ants are sentient so that complicates the matter. Let's simplify the hypothetical with an animal who clearly is sentient—a dog.

Again, let's think of this issue in the context of the animal. We certainly do not think that humans are equal for all purposes.

MOSTLY DOGS: The new book "Animals as Persons" does not seem directed to a mainstream audience—I would liken it to a bonus DVD of supplemental features that hardcore fans would love.

GARY FRANCIONE: "Animals as Person: Essays on the Abolition of Animal Exploitation" is not aimed just at "hardcore fans."

The book I am presently working on will be a debate-style book that I am writing with a colleague in which I will defend the abolitionist point of view and he will defend the welfarist position.

MOSTLY DOGS: Bonus question: When will your podcast begin?

GARY FRANCIONE: I am hoping we will have the first one out by the end of this month (August).

For readers who are interested in exploring these issues further, visit our website at www.AbolitionistApproach.com.

To readers: If you have follow-up questions for Gary Francione or for me, please post them as comments or email me directly.

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Tags: books, animal_rights, veganism

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Harry Seaward wrote: Ok animals are people, so the next time a neighbor dog trespasses into my yard I am going to place it under citizens arrest and have it euthanized.

MarkRobison wrote: Harry: That's a common -- but erroneous -- depiction of animal rights as well as Francione's idea about "animals as persons."

As for rights beyond this, that's up for debate. It's similar to human rights. International law throughout the world holds that no rights is mere property, that each person's life has inherent value even if no one else values it.

Further, the person to be accountable for "crimes," is one who has the capacity to understand that an act is a crime. For instance, a toddler who picks up a gun and shoots someone is not held accountable for that crime, but if I were to do the same thing, I would.

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susann wrote: Francione is a crackpot, pure and simple. Animals cannot have rights because the concept of "rights" is a human construct.

Believe me, in his deranged world there would be NO domesticated animals. Think about that for a minute. He believes domestication is slavery.

MarkRobison wrote: Susann: Calling someone a "crackpot" and "insane" doesn't help your argument. Please refrain from insults in the future or I'll need to reject your comments. But, for now, let's look at the specific criticisms you say make Professor Francione a crackpot.

1. You say that if a being cannot understand the concept of rights, they cannot have rights. Using this logic, then people with severe Alzheimer's, the mentally retarded and children cannot have rights either.

2. You say that thinking "domestication is slavery" is "insane." Let's imagine you were treated like the typical domesticated animal. You would be the property of your owner -- this makes you a slave.

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Harry Seaward wrote: So Mr Robison, I take it you must have no pets at home since they don't have the free will to declare their own desires?

MarkRobison wrote: You say that I must have no pets at home since they don't have the free will to declare their desires.

Harry Seaward wrote: Well, you're a man of solid conviction, I definitely respect you for that.

TheDogomom wrote: Mr. Francione says he doesn't use physical force. Yet, he then says the methods of Cesar Milan work just fine.

Cesar Milan is all about force, he just calls it (something) different. But using a choke chain pulled up tight, poking your dog, kicking your dog for pulling, yanking, scruffing, alpha rolling, etc. are force.

http://www.clickersolutions.com/articles/2001/dominance.htm

He discards himself largely in my eyes. The 30 year study of DOG behavior conducted by Dr. Frank Beach concluded that Alpha to dogs is nothing to do with who eats first, who goes through doorways first, or who can alpha roll whom, but it is about confidence and controlling access to resources.

And I had a dog live a healthy life to 17 who ate crappy cheap dog food for most of her life before I got her. There are also dogs on vegan diets who have become very, very sick and nearly died.

MarkRobison wrote: To TheDogomom: I agree. Francione is flat wrong about Cesar Milan. Training theory is not his area of expertise, and I emailed him links to the full Jean Donaldson assault against Milan. (It can never remember if it is one L or two in Milan. Is it like the city?)

Dogs can do pretty on lots of different diets. I'm sure Francione would agree: if your pet is doing poorly on one particular kind of food, it needs to be changed. As mentioned before on the blog, one vegan dog in the UK lived to be 27!

And I also think Francione is wrong about feeding a 100% vegan diet to cats, and I sent him information on this, too.

TheDogomom wrote: I struggle with the ideals of veganism. I commend people who live that way, and agree that the way we handle the slaughter of the animals we eat needs to be changed.

And people should not buy pet food that has animal by-products in its list of ingredients. Basically, if you can buy it in a grocery store, it is crap.

I don't believe in vegan diets for dogs, and definitely not cats.

Nor do I believe that training dogs to perform tasks for us, or having the dogs perform these tasks is exploiting them. I know dogs that adore doing the things they've received training for.

I don't believe in loving or competing with a dog that is not enjoying the experience for the benefit of the human's ego. Competition with dogs should be for the joy of working, not to line the wallets with ribbons.

I think it is mean to have a dog who has centuries of breeding to produce a dog, and then not let the dog work. But the dog should not be forced to perform. If the dog stops, say, as in Agility, the task stops and the human learns to live with it. It is wrong of the human to force the dog to continue.

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