

A black and white photograph of three cows standing behind a barbed wire fence. The cows are looking towards the camera. The fence is made of several strands of barbed wire, with the top strand being the most prominent. The background is a blurred field and sky.

# **Animal Rights: The Abolitionist Approach**

*Presents*

# **Animal Rights vs. Animal Welfare**

*by Professor Gary L. Francione*



Animal welfare theory maintains that it is morally acceptable to use nonhuman animals for human purposes as long as we treat them “humanely” and do not impose “unnecessary” suffering on them.

The goal of animal welfare is the  
*regulation* of animal use.

Animal rights theory maintains that we have no moral justification for using nonhuman animals for human purposes however “humanely” we treat them.

The goal of animal rights is the  
*abolition* of animal use.

These are very different approaches.

The difference between the animal welfare and animal rights position is similar to the difference in 19th century America between those who wanted to regulate slavery to make it more “humane” and those who wanted to abolish it.







Some people, who are referred to as “new welfarists,” maintain that we can achieve the abolition of animal use by making incremental changes that improve animal welfare.



For example, they claim that by making slaughter more “humane” or “improving” the treatment of animals used in experiments, we will eventually abolish the eating of animals or the use of animals in experiments.







There is no evidence to support this  
view.

We have had animal welfare for 200 years now in most western countries, and it has not led to the abolition of any institutional animal use.

We are using more animals now, and in more horrific ways, than at any time in human history.

If anything, animal welfare tends to facilitate animal exploitation because it makes people feel better about using animals.

Some people say that animal welfare  
changes make things better for  
animals that are here and suffering  
now.















But again, there is no evidence to support this.

For example, if we increase by a slight amount the cage space given to hens used in egg production, that may result in a minor decrease in discomfort for birds in the future.

If, however, that change makes people think that hens are being treated “humanely,” they may continue to consume eggs, or even eat more eggs, rather than stop eating eggs or decrease egg consumption.









In other words, making people think that animal exploitation is more “humane” may increase net suffering, particularly considering that most animal welfare regulations provide little protection in the first place.



Some prominent animal advocates and organizations have promoted campaigns to get fast-food chains to require that their suppliers use more “humane” methods of slaughter.

Even if these standards result in a slight decrease in animal suffering—a big “if”—any benefit is outweighed by the public-relations victory that is handed to the exploiters.

These fast-food chains can now claim  
that animal advocates praise their  
“humane” treatment of animals at the  
slaughterhouse.

Putting aside that these  
“improvements” in slaughtering  
processes will have little, if any,  
practical effect, the support of animal  
advocates can only help to make the  
public more comfortable about  
consuming animal products.















These sort of campaigns do not represent progress; indeed, they represent a big step backwards.



The protection offered by animal welfare laws and regulations is generally limited to what is required to exploit the animal in an economically efficient way.

Animal welfare does not recognize that nonhumans have any value except as economic commodities with extrinsic or conditional value.

Most animal welfare campaigns are based explicitly on making animal exploitation more profitable for animal exploiters.

For example, the campaign in the U.S. to replace the gestation crate for pigs with an alternative rearing system is based on the position that pigs raised in these alternative situations are healthier and more productive, thus increasing profits for exploiters.











Some animal advocates claim that we can be “conscientious omnivores” if we eat animal products that have been produced “humanely.”



Putting aside the fact that “humane” standards provide little protection, the position of these advocates is problematic.

As a general matter, it is, of course,  
“better” to do less harm than more  
once you have decided to inflict harm.

For example, it is “better” if a rapist does not beat his victim in addition to raping her.



But would we say that a rapist who does not beat his victim is a morally “conscientious rapist”?

Of course not.

Similarly, if we are going to inflict harm on animals, it is “better” that we inflict less and not more harm.



It is “better” that we eat an animal who  
has been tortured less than one who  
has been tortured more.



清遠雞

龍崗雞  
每斤

竹絲雞







But does that mean that we act morally  
if we eat the animal who has been  
tortured less? Can we be  
“conscientious omnivores” any more  
than we can be “conscientious  
rapists”?











No, not if we believe that animals are members of the moral community.

Does the fact that animal welfare is not effective and may be counterproductive mean that there is nothing that we can do now to help animals, reduce suffering, and work toward abolition?



No, it does not.

The most important thing that we can do as individuals is to become abolitionists in our personal lives—to become vegans who do not consume any animal products.

A vegan is someone who does not eat meat or dairy, and who does not wear animal clothing or use products that contain animal ingredients or that have been tested on animals.



But what is wrong with dairy? They don't kill animals to make dairy products, do they?

Yes they do. Animals used for dairy production and egg production are kept alive longer than animals used for meat, are treated as poorly if not worse, and end up in the same slaughterhouse.

There is probably more suffering in a glass of milk than in a pound of steak.















Veganism helps to reduce animal suffering in a significant way. Every person who becomes a vegan means that the demand for animal products decreases.

If you agree that animal rights means abolition, then veganism is the only morally consistent choice that you can make.

Just as a person who owned human slaves could not claim consistently to be in favor of the abolition of slavery, a person who continues to consume animal products cannot consistently be an advocate for animal rights and the abolition of animal slavery.



Is there anything else that you can do  
in addition to becoming a vegan?

Yes. You can educate others about  
veganism and the need to abolish  
animal exploitation.

Try to talk to at least one person every day about veganism. If, over the course of a year, only a few of those people become vegans, you will reduce suffering more than you will by spending your time working for laws that will give an extra inch of space to a battery hen.



Is it possible to pursue any meaningful legislative or regulatory changes that will help to achieve abolition?

Yes, it is possible but as a practical matter, it is very difficult because animals are property, and the law protects property interests.

To the extent that advocates want to pursue such changes, they should seek prohibitions of particular forms of animal exploitation rather than regulations that seek to make exploitation more “humane.”

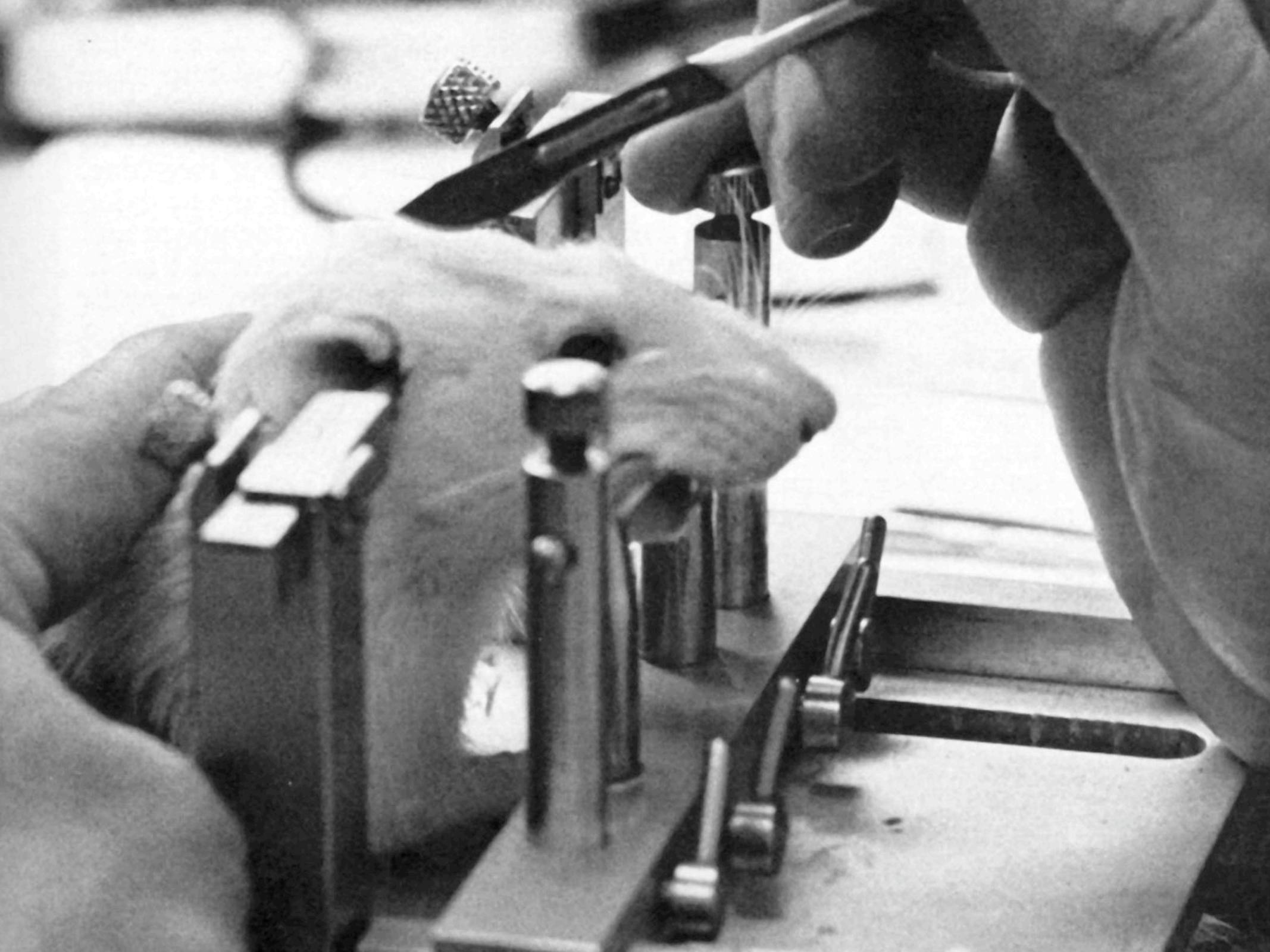


Prohibitions can help to incrementally  
eradicate the property status of  
nonhumans.

For example, a prohibition on using leghold traps at all is better than a requirement that only padded leghold traps be used.

A law that says no animal may be used  
for a particular type of experiment is  
better than a law that requires animals  
used in experiments be treated  
“humanely.”





An abolitionist prohibition should always recognize the inherent value of nonhumans, should never propose a supposedly more “humane” alternative for a less “humane” one, and should always be accompanied by a call for the abolition of all animal exploitation.

But veganism, and creative vegan/  
abolitionist education, are the most  
important things that we can do at the  
present time.



If there is ever to be any meaningful change in our treatment of nonhumans, we need to establish a political base for that change; we need to have a critical mass of people who are committed to abolition.

Examples of vegan/abolitionist  
education include:

Teaching about veganism in your local  
primary or secondary school;



Teaching classes on vegan cooking at  
a community center;









Having a vegan food booth at markets  
and festivals;

Organizing lawful boycotts of particular animal products or animal uses;

Organizing peaceful demonstrations  
and other events at which you provide  
literature and education about  
veganism and the need to abolish  
animal exploitation.



We must educate, educate, educate.

Educating the public about the moral, environmental, and health aspects of veganism must be the first priority.

Some advocates claim that most people become vegetarians first and continue to eat dairy products, eggs, etc. before they go vegan and so we should encourage vegetarianism rather than veganism.



That position makes no sense.

Even if it is true that most people do not go directly from eating meat, dairy, honey, etc. to veganism, it is still better to promote veganism and not vegetarianism to the extent that means the consumption of any animal products.

If we promote veganism, those people who are concerned about the issue but not willing to go vegan yet will become vegetarians anyway. That is, we do not stop anyone from taking interim steps.



We just do not encourage them to believe that interim steps (the continued consumption of any animal products) are morally acceptable.

If we encourage interim steps as morally acceptable, then we can be sure that many people will *only* take those interim steps.

The message should be clear and  
consistent:

To say that it is morally acceptable to eat dairy but not meat (or vice versa) is like saying that it is OK to eat large pigs but not small pigs.











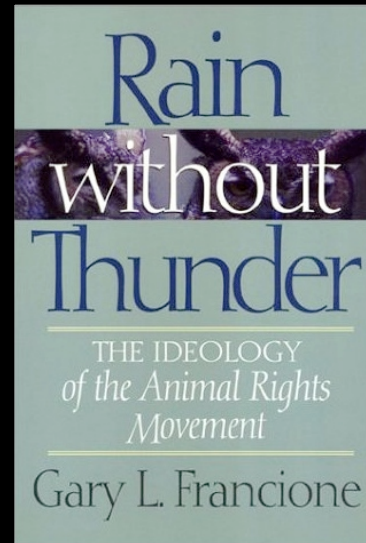
There is *no* distinction to be made  
between flesh and dairy.

What about violence in support of  
animal rights?



Animal rights is a theory of peace, and not of violence. The animal rights advocate objects to violence perpetrated against both humans and nonhumans.

*This presentation was based on:*



**Rain Without Thunder:  
The Ideology of the Animal Rights  
Movement**

*Please note: This presentation was not intended to be a complete statement of Professor Francione's views, but only a brief and general introduction to the distinction between animal rights and animal welfare.*

*For a further discussion of the property  
status of animals, please see our  
presentation of:*

## **Animals as Property**



*For a further discussion of why we should  
not treat nonhumans as our property,  
please see our presentation of:*

## **Theory of Animal Rights**

*For a further discussion on prohibitions  
as opposed to regulations, please see our  
presentation of:*

## **Animal Law**

*Thanks to the Humane Farming Association and Gail Eisnitz for supplying us with some of the slaughterhouse and factory farm photos used in this presentation.*

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A black and white photograph of three cows standing behind a barbed wire fence. The cows are looking towards the camera. The fence is made of multiple strands of wire, with the top strand being barbed. The background is a hazy, open field.

*For further discussions of these and other  
animal rights related issues, please visit:*

**[www.AbolitionistApproach.com](http://www.AbolitionistApproach.com)**