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Animal Rights: The Abolitionist Approach

Presents

Theory of Animal Rights

by Professor Gary L. Francione

We all agree that it is morally wrong to inflict “unnecessary” suffering on nonhuman animals.

A prohibition on “unnecessary” suffering must mean, at the very least, that it is wrong to inflict suffering on animals for reasons of pleasure, amusement, or convenience.

But the overwhelming amount of suffering and death that we inflict on nonhumans can be justified *only* by pleasure, amusement, or convenience.

Our uses of nonhuman animals for entertainment or for sport hunting cannot, by definition, be considered as necessary.





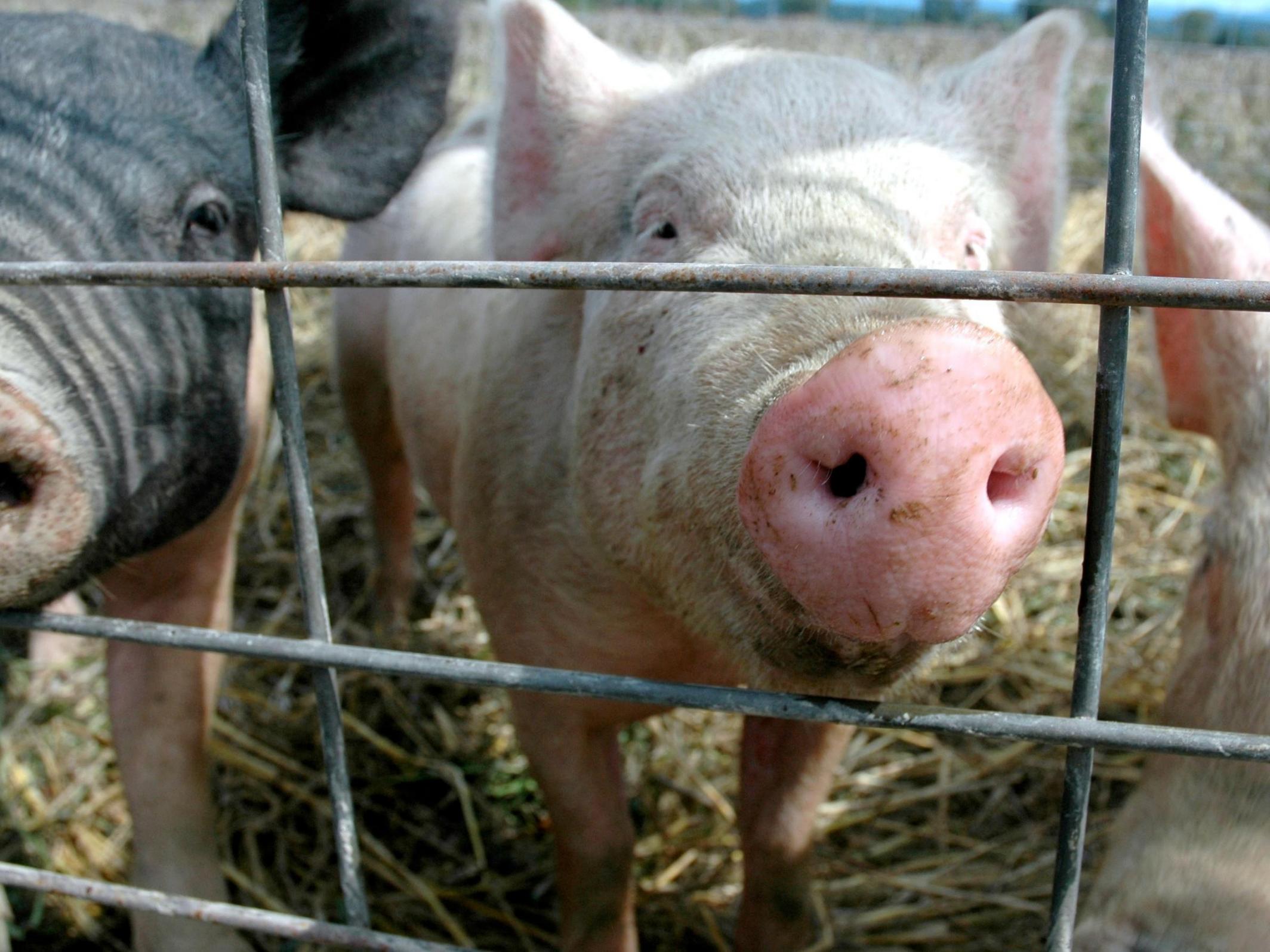
It is certainly not necessary for us to wear fur or leather coats, or to use nonhuman animals to test duplicative household products, or to have yet another brand of lipstick or aftershave lotion.





The most significant number of animals that we use is for food—meat, dairy, and other animal products that we consume.

We slaughter more than 10 billion animals for food each year in the U.S. alone, not counting the billions of fish and other sea animals we kill.







It is not necessary in *any* sense to eat
meat or animal products.

It is increasingly accepted that meat and dairy products are detrimental to human health. Animal products are linked to cancer, heart disease, and many other illnesses.

Moreover, respected environmental scientists have pointed out the tremendous costs to our planet of animal agriculture.

For every kilogram (2.2 pounds) of animal protein produced, animals consume almost six kilograms, or more than thirteen pounds, of plant protein from grains and forage.

It takes more than 100,000 liters of water (26,316 gallons) to produce one kilogram of beef; it takes 3,500 liters (921 gallons) to produce one kilogram of chicken. It takes only 900 liters (237 gallons) to produce one kilogram of wheat and 500 liters (132 gallons) to produce a kilogram of potatoes.

Animal agriculture consumes enormous amounts of energy, and results in the devastation of topsoil and the pollution of air and water.

The nonhumans that we eat produce billions of tons of waste per year and these wastes are often dumped untreated into watercourses and they release greenhouse gases.



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And because animal agriculture involves such an inefficient use of resources, it condemns a significant portion of the world's population to starvation.

More than 50% of the U.S. grain and 40% of world grain is fed to animals to produce meat, rather than being consumed directly by humans.

It takes only $\frac{1}{6}$ of an acre to supply a vegan with food for a year; it takes $3 \frac{1}{4}$ acres to supply a non-vegan with food. That means that an acre of land can feed about 20 times more vegans than it can non-vegans.

There are, of course, political, social, and economic factors that are responsible for world hunger. But animal agriculture exacerbates the problem through its inefficient use of resources.

Our *only* justification for the pain, suffering, and death inflicted on these billions of nonhumans is that we enjoy the taste of meat and dairy products.





And if we really do take seriously that it is wrong to inflict unnecessary suffering on nonhumans, our enjoyment in eating animal products *cannot* be a morally acceptable justification.

Our *only* use of animals that is not transparently trivial is the use of animals in experiments intended to find cures for serious human illnesses. But even in this context, there are serious questions about the necessity of animal use.

Because of the biological differences between humans and other animals, there is always a problem extrapolating the results of animal experiments to humans.



The data produced by animal use are often unreliable. For example, results from toxicity tests using animals can vary dramatically depending on the method that is used.

Considerable empirical evidence indicates that, in many instances, reliance on animal models in experiments has actually been counterproductive.

For example, the failure to create an animal model of lung cancer led researchers to ignore evidence of a strong correlation of smoking and lung cancer in humans.



And much human illness is the result of
our eating animal products.

The Bottom Line:

We kill billions of nonhumans every year for reasons that cannot plausibly be considered as “necessary” even though we maintain that we accept that it is wrong to inflict “unnecessary” suffering on animals.

When it comes to other animals, we humans exhibit what can best be described as *moral schizophrenia*. We say one thing about how animals should be treated, and we turn right around and do another.

Our thinking is confused.

Many of us have companion animals, such as dogs and cats. We treat these nonhumans as members of our families.



Yet, we stick forks into other nonhumans who are no different from those who we regard as members of our families.







We need to rethink our relationship
with animals.

If nonhumans matter, if we really believe that they are not mere things, and that their interests are morally significant, then we must accord their interests *equal consideration*.

This does not mean that in all instances we must treat animals the same as we treat humans.

For example, nonhumans do not have an interest in getting an education.

Therefore, the principle of equal consideration does not require that we provide an education to them even if we provide one to all humans.

But if a human and a nonhuman have a similar interest, we must treat them the same relative to that interest—unless we have a morally sound reason not to do so.

Although humans have many interests that nonhumans do not have (and vice versa), all *sentient* beings—beings who are conscious of sensations and can experience pain and suffering—have an interest in avoiding pain, suffering and death.

Humans and nonhumans alike have an interest in not being eaten, used in experiments or as forced organ donors, hunted, or otherwise treated as the mere *resources* of others.



If you are a resource of others, then all of your interests—including your most fundamental interests in not suffering and in continued life—may be ignored if it benefits someone else.

We do not—we cannot—protect humans from all suffering and death.

But we do protect them from all suffering and death as the result of their use as the resources or property of others.

We regard *all* humans as having a
fundamental *right* not to be the
property of others.

A right is simply a way of protecting an interest. If an interest is protected by a right, then that interest must be protected even if it would benefit others to violate the interest.

For example, to say that I have a right of free speech means that my interest in expressing myself will be protected even if my expression has negative consequences for others.

A right is like a wall that surrounds an interest. And on that wall is a sign that reads: “No trespassing—even if it will benefit you to do so.”

My interest in not being your property
is protected by a right in that my
interest is protected even if it would
benefit you to treat me as your
resource.

In a world in which there is little agreement on moral issues, most people accept that human slavery is morally wrong. Slavery treats *persons as things*.



Slavery necessarily deprives those who are enslaved of equal consideration.

A slave will never count for as much as
a slave owner.

Property will never count for as much
as a property owner.

Even if a slave and a non-slave have a similar interest, we will not see that similarity because we will always discount the interests of slaves.

This does not mean that human slavery has been completely abolished. It has not. But no one defends it as morally acceptable and we condemn it wherever it is found still to exist.

We treat animals in ways in which we would not regard it as appropriate to treat any human. Animals are the property of humans. We own them. They have only the value that we choose to give them.







Nonhumans are the slaves of humans.



How can we justify this differential treatment? How can we justify regarding all humans as having a right not to be the property of others, but regard nonhumans as our property?

The usual explanation is that there is some *qualitative* difference between humans and nonhumans that justifies treating animals as our property.

A qualitative difference is one of *kind* and not *degree*. I can do calculus; a dog cannot. That is a qualitative difference, a difference in kind. Some people are better at calculus than I am, but I can do some calculus. That is a *quantitative* difference, a difference in degree.

We have historically justified our exploitation of nonhumans on the ground that there is a qualitative distinction between the minds of humans and other animals.

We recognize that animals are sentient,
but we deny that they are intelligent,
rational, emotional, or self-conscious.



But the proposition that humans have mental characteristics wholly absent in nonhumans is inconsistent with the theory of evolution.

Darwin maintained that there are no uniquely human characteristics. He argued that nonhumans can think and reason, and possess many of the same emotional attributes as humans.

Moreover, any attempt to justify our exploitation of nonhumans based on their lack of human characteristics begs the moral question by assuming that human characteristics are morally superior and justify differential treatment.

For example, even if humans are the only animals who can recognize themselves in mirrors or communicate through symbolic language, no human is capable of flying, or breathing under water without assistance.





What makes the ability to recognize oneself in a mirror or use symbolic language better in a moral sense than the ability to fly or breathe under water?

The answer, of course, is that *we* say
so.

Moreover, even if we assume that human characteristics are “special” , the lack of those characteristics cannot serve as a justification for exploitation.

For example, some humans who are severely mentally disabled lack the cognitive skills that normal humans have. This deficiency may be relevant for some purposes, but has no relevance to whether we use such humans as unconsenting subjects in biomedical experiments or as forced organ donors.

In the end, the only difference between humans and nonhumans is species, and species is no more a justification for exploitation than is race, sex or sexual orientation. *Speciesism* is no different from racism, sexism, or homophobia.

If we want to think seriously about the human/nonhuman relationship, there is only one characteristic that is relevant:

Sentience



We need to extend the right not to be treated as property to all sentient nonhumans irrespective of their other mental characteristics.

There are some animal advocates who argue that we ought to give greater moral significance and legal protection to certain animals, such as the great apes or dolphins, because they have a more humanlike intelligence.



We must avoid creating new hierarchies in which we treat some animals as “special” based on their being “like us”.

To do so would be speciesist.

Although there are differences between, say, a chimpanzee and a fish, and although these differences may be relevant for some purposes (different nonhumans have different interests), for purposes of the basic right not to be treated as property, there is no morally relevant difference.

The fish and the chimpanzee are both
sentient beings.

We should treat neither as our
resource.

The chimpanzee should not be in a zoo
or a laboratory.



The fish should not be on a plate.



If we recognized that all sentient beings had a basic, moral right not to be treated as property and that we had a moral duty to stop treating sentient beings as resources, we would stop bringing domestic animals into existence for our use.

We ought to *abolish* animal exploitation
and not seek merely to *regulate* it.

Recognizing “animal rights” does not mean letting all domestic animals run free in the streets.



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Small poster or sign on the utility pole.

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It means caring for those whom we
have caused to come into existence.



And not bringing any more into
existence to use for food, clothing,
entertainment, or experiments.

The fundamental issue is not whether
we treat the cow “humanely”.

The fundamental issue is: Why are we bringing cows into existence in the first place?

The only reason why the cow exists is so that we can exploit her for her meat and milk.

Once we recognize that we have no moral justification for exploiting her—however “humane” our animal slavery may be—there is no reason to have cows any longer.

Consider a thought experiment:

Imagine you walk past a house that is
on fire.



You can see that there is a human and
a dog in the house.





You have time to save one but not
both.

Which one do you save?

Let us assume that you decide that
you ought to save the human.

What would that tell you about whether
it is acceptable to exploit animals?

The answer: *nothing*.

Assume that you are walking by the burning house and you see that there are two humans in the house: a young person and a very old person. You decide to save the young person because she has more of her life ahead of her.

Does that mean that it is OK to use the elderly as unconsenting subjects in biomedical experiments or as forced organ donors?

Of course not.

So even if we would choose the human over the nonhuman in a situation of true conflict or emergency, that says nothing about whether it is acceptable to treat animals as our resources.

We create most of our conflicts with nonhumans. We bring domestic animals into existence for our use. We drag the nonhumans into the burning house, and we then wonder about how to resolve the “conflict” that we have created!

Even if we assume that we can resolve true conflicts between humans and nonhumans in favor of humans, that does not mean that we can create those conflicts.

If we took the interests of animals seriously, we would stop bringing domestic animals into existence.

There is no reason—other than our pleasure, amusement, or convenience—to eat animal meat or dairy, wear animals, hunt animals, or use animals in entertainment.



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





Nonhuman animals used to produce dairy products live longer than “meat” animals, are treated as badly if not worse, and end up in the same slaughterhouse in the end.



There is more suffering in a glass of milk than in a steak. If you regard nonhuman animals as having moral significance, you should not eat any animal products.



What about the use of animals in science? Isn't that "necessary"?

Isn't there a real conflict between humans and animals whose use in experiments may help to save the lives of humans?

There is much evidence that using animal “models” in science has been harmful to human health. But even if we assume that in some instances it has been beneficial to us, does that make it right?



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Some people say that it is morally acceptable to use nonhuman animals in experiments because they lack some characteristic—such as intelligence or rationality—that humans possess.

Would it be acceptable to use severely mentally disabled humans in an experiment—even if it would result in a cure for cancer?

Isn't there a real conflict between normal humans and disabled humans whose use in experiments may help to save the lives of normal humans?

If your answer is “no”, then why is it acceptable to use the nonhumans?
Why do we think that there is a conflict between humans and nonhumans?

The only answer that we can give is
that we are human and they are not.



And that is no different from saying
that we are white and they are not;

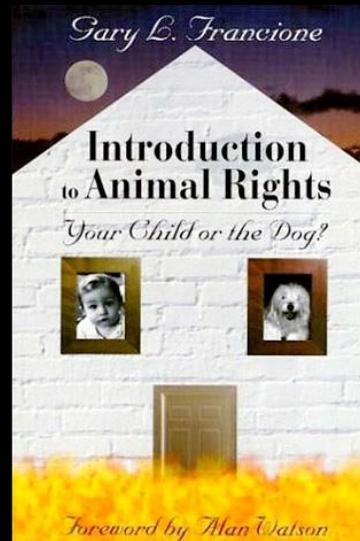
Or we are male and they are not;

Or we are straight and they are not.

We use nonhumans in experiments in which we would never use a human because we are *speciesist*, which is no different from being racist, sexist, or homophobic.

And that is the only justification that we
have.

This presentation was based on:



Introduction to Animal Rights: Your Child or the Dog?

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 his abolitionist theory of animal rights.

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

Animals as Property

For a further discussion on the distinction between the abolition and regulation of animal exploitation, please see our presentation of:

Animal Rights vs. Animal Welfare

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

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

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