

## Animal Rights and the Image of God

T. Stuart Walker, Ph.D.

*Dr. Walker is Associate Professor of Medical Education in the Indiana University School of Medicine at Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana.*

"Thou saw the fields lay bare and waste,  
An' weary winter comin fast,  
An' cozie here, beneath the blast  
Thou thought to dwell  
Till crash! The cruel coulter past  
Out thro' thy cell."

"But mousie, thou art no thy lane,  
In proving foresight may be vain.  
The best laid schemes o' mice an' men  
Gang aft a'gley,  
An' lea'e us naught but grief an' pain  
For promis'd joy."

"Still thou art blest, compar'd wi' me!  
The present only toucheth thee:  
But, Och! I backward cast my e'e  
On prospects drear!  
An' forward, tho' I canna see,  
I guess an' fear!"

"To a Mouse, On Turning Her Up in Her Nest with the Plough, November, 1785". Robert Burns

### Part I: the case for animal rights

It was 7:00 A.M., July 4, 1989, and the Texas Tech Health Sciences Center was quiet and empty. Since near dawn, six animal rights activists associated with the Animal Liberation Front (ALF) had been watching the comings and goings of the few security officers on campus. The signal was given, and four activists slipped into the building, heading for the laboratory of Dr. John Orem, a physiology professor in the School of Medicine. Because this was an inside job, as many such attacks are, the animal rights terrorists knew exactly where to look for records and what to destroy.

Laboratory notebooks and some video records were quickly found and taken, and then the four began their jihad against Dr. Orem's equipment. Within a few frenzied moments, \$70,000 of research equipment was reduced to scrap metal, and the intruders now turned their attention to the resident animals. Five cats were taken - cats which had been the subjects of Dr. Orem's work on sleep apnea and sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS). They were stuffed into burlap bags, and the four activists slipped away with their feline burdens like so many inverse Santa Clauses. As a parting shot, one of the activists, a high school history teacher calling himself "Dave", spray-painted a message on the wall, a play on words taken from a standard Texas road sign: "Don't mess with Texas animals."

The attack suffered by John Orem was only one of approximately 70 such attacks which have occurred in the United States during the past 6 years. Of these, 48 have involved burglary and destruction of equipment. Their impact has spread far beyond those investigators who have been victimized; they affect all of us who do research. Fear of attacks and the relentless onslaught of animal rights advocates have bred a bunker mentality within the research community. In some cases, universities have pressured investigators to stop doing research, even return grant funds, to avoid the embarrassment of defending research using animals as an integral mission of the university. It has been estimated that 15 - 20% of all funds earmarked for research are spent on meeting newly developed federal security and animal care regulations. Imagine the furor if the Office of Management and Budget cut federal research funds by this amount! Yet, this is, in effect, what has happened.

These trends have been reflected in an erosion in public

support of research and in growing public misconceptions about how scientists treat their animals. Dr. Fred Goodwin, Administrator of the Alcohol, Drug Abuse and Mental Health Administration of the National Institutes of Health reported in March at a symposium in Lubbock, Texas, entitled "Conflict of the 90's: the Siege by Animal Rights Activists" that since the 1960's, federal support for research in the United States has dropped from 2.8% to 1.7% of the gross national product (GNP). Yet, the percentage of the GNP that Japan and Germany spend on research has risen to 2.8% during that same period. During 1989 the American Medical Association (AMA) surveyed public attitudes about animal use in research. Although the news was generally good - 77% recognized the necessity of animal use in medical research and 64% supported the use of animals in research - there were some disturbing trends. Between the ages of 16 and 29, the percentage of those who supported and opposed research animal use was split 50/50. Three quarters of those surveyed said they believed there was "some to a lot" of animal torture by scientists. Half of those surveyed believed there are no animal use regulations, and half of those aware of such regulations did not believe that scientists comply with them. Meanwhile, public support for animal rights groups has been growing. During 1989, Town and Country magazine listed the top ten animal rights groups. While the principal organization opposing the animal rights movement, the Foundation for Biomedical Research (FBR) has a staff of 5 and a modest budget, animal rights groups claim approximately 10 million supporters with PETA, the largest of these groups, having a national staff of 60. With total budgets of about 50 million dollars, these organizations have begun to wield considerable political and public relations clout.

Who are the animal rights advocates? Why has this movement, which seemed to have all but died out during the early part of this century, now reappeared with exceptional vigor? The roots of the animal rights movement lie in the antivivisection movement of the 19th century. This movement, which gained popularity during the latter half of the 19th century and continued into the early 20th century, achieved its greatest popularity in Great Britain. After lying dormant since World War I, the animal rights movement has once

again burst on the scene, this time with a new philosophical base but brandishing the same secondary arguments they have used for over one hundred years.

Many have been confused with the goals and philosophy of the movement because they have failed to recognize that there are two distinct movements concerned with human use of animals, each with its own agenda and philosophy. Adding to this confusion is that animal rights groups have used the arguments of groups concerned with animal welfare to further their own agenda. These movements can be differentiated by their philosophies and their goals.

Adherents of the animal welfare movement believe that we are to be responsible stewards of the animals which come under our influence, and that responsible stewardship involves humane care. As such, animal welfare advocates are generally supportive of research animal use, but seek to ensure that the animals are comfortable in their surroundings. They work with animal shelters to pick up stray companion animals, and promote pet adoption and neutering programs. They work with zoos and pet owners to educate them on the needs of animals and the responsibilities of animal ownership. A number of such organizations exist; the best known of these is the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA).

The animal rights movement stands in stark contrast to the animal welfare societies. Animal rightists believe that animals and humans are morally equivalent, and, as such, have equivalent moral, ethical and legal rights. Because animals and humans are morally/ethically equivalent, many "rightists" believe that all human use of animals without their consent is immoral. Because animals cannot give consent, humans must not use them in any way for their own benefit. Thus, many animal rights advocates oppose all human uses of animals, including food, clothing, sport, biomedical research, zoos, entertainment, and pet ownership (which has been likened by some to slavery). Some, who call themselves "vegans", oppose the use of animal products such as eggs and milk. Some representative animal rights organizations include PETA, the Animal Liberation Front (ALF), and the Physicians' Committee for Responsible Medicine (PCRM).

What is the underlying philosophy of the animal rights movement? Some, frustrated by emotion-laden confrontations with animal rights activists have wrongly concluded that the movement is populated with and driven by "crazies." For example, Larry Horton writing in the journal *In Vitro* stated:

" ... some observers would trace the bloodlines of the current activism back to Luddites, creationists, and others upset with science."

Thus, a line is quickly drawn between the rational (scientists) and the irrational reactionaries (Luddites, creationists and animal rights activists). Animal rights proponents have buttressed this image by their outspoken value statements ("a rat is a pig is a boy is a dog"), and by their popular secondary arguments which claim that experiments performed on animals cannot be extrapolated to humans. I believe that most people are revolted by statements which devalue human life, concluding that only someone who has lost touch with reality could equate the life of a boy with that of a rat. Taken to its logical conclusion (*reductio ad infinitum*, *reductio ad absurdum*) such a stance would require either that humans be charged with murder when they willfully kill mice with traps, or would devalue human life as being equally incidental as that of a mouse. Either option is unacceptable. Additionally, scientists are repulsed by claims that studies which use animal models cannot be extrapolated to humans. The reality is that most significant medical advances that we enjoy today have been heavily based upon studies which could not have been performed without the use of animals. For example, it was only as we began to understand the mouse immune system that we had the necessary keys to unlock the secrets of human immune function. As the patterns of human immune structure and responsiveness began to unfold, we found that our immune system is amazingly like that of a mouse, with most of the differences being in the expression of particular cell surface antigens. Thus, the mouse model of immune responsiveness has allowed us to know much about our own immune system, and application of the principles learned in these animal studies have saved many human lives. Many of the foundational studies of immune function could not have been performed in humans

because of the danger they would have posed to human life. It is odd that animal rights proponents use this particular argument to oppose animal use in research because it contradicts one of the key presuppositions of the ethical/philosophical base of the movement; that is, that humans and animals are phylogenetically interrelated. It is not my purpose to review here the medical and scientific advances which have depended upon the availability of research animals. Rather, I merely wish to point out that when animal rights proponents argue that animal studies cannot be extrapolated to humans they are dealing with an issue that is secondary to the real issues of animal rights. Furthermore, use of such secondary arguments damages the credibility of the animal rights movement in the eyes of medical scientists because it makes those who use these arguments appear to be ignorant or deceitful.

The arguments for animal rights are many, but the major non-Christian arguments can be reduced to a single unifying claim that humans and non-human animals are ontologically identical, and that all differences in creaturely categories are differences in degree rather than differences in essence. There is significant diversity within the movement as to how this claim of ontological unity is supported, and some proponents hold only one or two of the three most common arguments for unity. These arguments can be summarized as follows:

First, humans are, after all, animals and are phylogenetically interrelated with all other animals. For example, Michael Fox has stated:

"There is indeed kinship in the present diversity and evolutionary continuity of all life ... It is more important today than ever before for human beings to be aware of their kinship with all life. It is essential for our survival that we have a strong reverence for all forms of life as our kin and see all as part of creation (or of evolution as a godlike creative process if you wish)."

Fox is unusual in his application of this philosophy, in that he encourages humans to use their evolutionarily

derived role of overseer of the earth to act preemptively in managing the affairs of animals. Others disdain this approach, and would prefer a "hands off" relationship with animals. If we are phylogenetically interrelated, they say, we cannot claim priority for our interests. Thus, it is imperative that we live in such a way as to minimally alter the evolutionarily determined life patterns and relationships of animals. Michael Fox has posited this argument:

"Fulfillment of any living creature would be its union with the environment for which it is best adapted and to which its whole being is receptively attuned. To deprive it of such natural fulfillment would be as inhumane as if its instincts and potentials were never fully actualized but instead were frustrated, blocked, or denied. This is the core philosophy of humanistic psychology, which is concerned with provision of an optimal environment for the ultimate fulfillment self-actualization) of an individual's potentials ... Since there is no qualitative difference between the fulfilling unity of man and his world and that of any other animal and its world, certain human and ethical questions must be raised."

It is easy to see in this a natural kinship between the animal rights movement and many in the environmental movement. Indeed, there have been increasing instances of cooperation between animal rights and environmental activists on behalf of animals. Second, some assert that there is spiritual continuity among all life forms, or at least among all sentient creatures. This view is espoused by Michael Fox in his article "What future for man and earth? Toward a biospiritual ethic." This argument takes several modes, ranging from the mysticism of classic Buddhism at one extreme to a network of essential interrelatedness analogous to the much-celebrated "Gaia" cosmology at the other. According to the proponents of "Gaia," the earth functions like a living organism, with each creature in the biosphere vitally interrelated by its function within the cosmic framework. Each creature is like a living cell within an organism called Gaia (the earth), and each of us is vitally dependent upon the survival and proper functioning of

each of the cells and organelles of the Gaia organism. Fox's position seems to be more closely aligned to those who are Gaia proponents, but the language he uses is such that any in this spectrum could feel at ease with his terminology. A brief review of some of his statements reveals a view that is heavily influenced by Buddhism but is more Gaia in its application:

"I give my pledge as a world citizen to respect all life as I respect my own kind, to cherish nature's creations and riches which I shall neither use thoughtlessly nor abuse willfully, since man and nature are of one earth and one spirit."

"Man upsets the cosmic equilibrium of ecology, society, and spirit when he thinks and acts without feeling and empathy for others, including plants and animals, oceans and forests."

"We must therefore transcend our illusory egocentric species-boundaries, a la Hartshorn, to discover our natural mind-potential in oneness with nature, a oneness for which we are genetically predisposed and predestined: one earth, one mind."

"The Nirvana state or principle represents this center (a center of pure essence or spirit found in every relationship and experience) as the eternal void of infinite potential beyond death and yet within the life-awareness of pure being. It is the essence of life fulfilled in and through consciousness and expressed in thought, feeling, and action. This Nirvana principle therefore penetrates the time-space continuum of mortal transience in all sentient beings, linking individuated species and patterned fields of relatedness with the aesthetic or cosmic potential of undifferentiated potential."

Regardless of whether it is argued that this unity is an actual spiritual interconnection and communication, or if it is an expression of functional interrelatedness and

interdependence among all creatures, the proponents of this stance all are asserting ontological unity.

Finally, Tom Regan and others have claimed ontological unity among all sentient creatures on the basis of an existential unity. Regan's critical point of unity is that we all are the experiencing subject of a life, and it matters to us what happens to us during that life. In Regan's words:

"And the really crucial, the basic similarity is simply this: we are each of us the experiencing subject of a life, a conscious creature having an individual welfare that has importance to us whatever our usefulness to others."

This evidence of unity among all sentient creatures is evidence of the existence of a creaturely attribute associated with the presence of experiencing life, the attribute of "inherent value." Regan does not start by arguing that animals have rights. Rather, he argues that intuition tells us that all humans, regardless of their creaturely capabilities have inherent value. Speaking of the panoply of human life, Regan states:

" ... all have inherent value, all possess it equally, and all have an equal right to be treated with respect, to be treated in ways that do not reduce them to the status of things, as if they existed as resources for others."

Because animals, too, are the experiencing subjects of a life, they also have inherent value:

" ... they too must be viewed as the experiencing subjects of a life, with inherent value of their own."

Because the inherent value of a person is unrelated to the quality of his life, then we cannot say that animals possess less inherent value simply because their degree of sentience is less than is ours.

"What could be the basis of our having more inherent value than animals? Their

lack of reason, or autonomy, or intellect? Only if we are willing to make the same judgment in the case of humans who are similarly deficient. But it is not true that such humans - the retarded child, for example, or the mentally deranged - have less inherent value than you or I. Neither, then, can we rationally sustain the view that animals like them in being the experiencing subjects of a life have less inherent value. All who have inherent value have it equally, whether they be human animals or not. Inherent value, then, belongs equally to those who are the experiencing subjects of a life."

In turning to the postulated existence of inherent value as the arbiter of human response and interaction with other creatures, Regan strongly opposes contractarianism and utilitarianism. The utilitarian sees each of us as a cup; our value is dependent upon what is in the cup. Regan abhors this, affirming that the value resides in the cup itself, and that all cups are of equal value.

If all creatures, or at least all sentient creatures are ontologically indistinguishable because all are animals, all share in the same spiritual essence, and all possess a nonquantitative attribute called inherent value which is related to the fact that we all are the experiencing subjects of a life, how should this mold my behavior toward other creatures? Michael Fox insists that these unities should propel us into a deontic application of ethics:

" ... things identical in kind are equal in value, and this so-called formal 'deontic' logic leads to a natural ethical obligation toward all forms of creation."

How this is actually played out varies considerably among the proponents of animal rights. We have already seen that Fox argues for a deontic ethic while also demanding that man should assert his rightful place in the cosmos to manage the affairs of the world, guided by a biospiritual ethic. Fox and Peter Singer, whose overriding concern is the relative presence of sentience,

would allow humans to use animals for certain purposes if the ethical balance for all parties involved leans toward animal use as bringing about the greatest good. In those cases, every possible step should be taken to insure that the victim of the situation does not suffer. Contrast this with the abolitionist stance of Regan:

"That movement (the animal rights movement), as I conceive it, is committed to a number of goals, including: \*the total abolition of the use of animals in science \*the total dissolution of commercial animal agriculture \*the total elimination of commercial and sport hunting and trapping."

Thus, Regan opposes all animal use by humans, because it is animal use; that is, it involves using animals as resources, failing to respect their inherent value. Richard Ryder has melded these approaches:

"Whereas I agree with Singer on the importance of suffering as the bedrock of morality, I tend to agree with Regan that it is wrong to aggregate across individual sentients. This is because I believe that in such matters the individual consciousness is everything. It is therefore wrong for me to inflict suffering unless it brings greater advantages to the same individual."

Using this ethic, in the absence of an ethical hierarchy, "lifeboat" decisions become impossible. That is, when creatures face situations where their interests are in direct conflict and each would face the same consequence if any of the choices available are made, there is no basis for determining which option is correct. The end result could be the loss of all the lives in the "lifeboat."

Thus, the animal rights movement insists on at least only minimal use of animals, with many demanding a total abolition of human use of animals coupled with a recognition that animals and humans have equal rights of existence and self-determination. Regan expresses this view when he reflects on the statement of Leonardo DaVinci that "the time will come when men such as I

will look upon the murder of animals as they now look upon the murder of men." To this, Regan says, "One can only hope that time is soon."

Does the Scripture agree with this assessment? Are we and the world of animals essentially equivalent with equal moral claims?

### [Next issue: Part II. A Biblical Response to Animal Rights]

## References

1. Horton's editorial was published twice: first as *J. Natl. Cancer Inst.*, 81, 736 - 743 (1989) and again as *In Vitro Cell. Dev. Biol.* 25:486 - 493 (1989).
2. Attributed first to Ingrid Newkirk of P.E.T.A. by Katie McCabe in "Who Will Live and Who Will Die?" in *The Washingtonian* (August, 1986, p. 114). Novelist Isaac Bashevis Singer has taken this position a step farther by asserting "In relation to animals, all people are Nazis." and "... for the animals it is an eternal Treblinka." (cited by Tom Regan in *The Struggle for Animal Rights*, International Society for Animal Rights, Inc., Clarks Summit, PA, 1987, p. 77). It has been popularly reported that Ingrid Newkirk and others have also made this connection, comparing the raising of broiler chickens with Nazi atrocities committed against Jews at Dachau.
3. Fox, Michael A. in "Man and Nature: Biological Perspectives," in: *On the Fifth Day*, Morris, Richard K. and Fox, Michael (eds.), Acropolis Books, Washington, D.C., p. 121.
4. For example, in an article entitled "What Future for Man and Earth? Toward a Biospiritual Ethic," *ibid.*, Fox states: "Animal rights will depend on man's assuming fully his role as steward of the planet earth, and he must judge, regulate, and even destroy in order to maintain order, health, life, and harmony in the biosphere. Animal rights must be addressed not from a zoocentric standpoint, nor from an anthropocentric one, but on a biospiritual basis. There is no room or future for the romantic preservationist who would leave nature to itself, since nature is man, and we must monitor and regulate both with understanding and compassion." He further states, "... we must impose restraints in natural behaviors in certain contexts in our domesticated animals just as people must abide by certain rules and social restraints." (Both p. 229)
5. Fox, Michael W., *ibid.*, p. 117-118.
6. For example, during 1989, environmental activists Jeremy Rifkin filed suit in Federal district court to halt all federally funded research on the basis that all such studies violated

federal environmental regulations. In California, environmental and animal rights groups have cooperated in trying to halt the construction of university research facilities.

7. Fox, Michael W., *ibid*, p. 219 - 230.

8. The Gaia hypothesis is largely the child of James Lovelock who published his hypothesis that the earth is a single huge organism in his book Gaia: A New Look at Life on Earth, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1979. During 1988 Lovelock modified his views somewhat, retreating under pressure by fellow scientists from the concept that the earth is actually a living organism. At a conference during that year sponsored by the American Geophysical Union, Lovelock conceded that his teleologic argument was too strong and proposed, instead, a nonteleologic model of the earth in which "the nonliving and the living represent a self-regulating system that keeps itself in a constant state." For a review of the evolution of the Gaia concept see *Science*, 240: 393-395 (1988).

9. Fox, Michael, W., *op. cit.*, p. 220.

10. *Ibid*, p. 223.

11. *Ibid*, p. 225.

12. *Ibid*, p. 227.

13. Regan, Tom, The Case for Animal Rights, International Society for Animal Rights, Inc., Clarks Summit, PA, 1987, 0. 59.

14. *Ibid*, p. 58.

15. *Ibid*, p. 59.

16. *Ibid*, p. 60.

17. Fox, Michael, *op. cit.*, p. 227.

18. Regan, Tom, *op. cit.*, pp. 46 - 47.

19. Ryder, Richard D., Animal Revolution, Basil Blackwell, Ltd., Cambridge, MA, 1989, pp. 325 - 326.

20. Regan, Tom, *op. cit.*, p. 81.