

Animals Are Not Inanimate Objects

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In 1980, a small group of friends started People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals. Back then, no one had heard of "animal rights." Today, people remain confused as to what the term means, but they *do* know that how we treat animals is important. Acknowledging animals' rights can be as simple as respecting their needs. Of course, animals don't need complex rights, like the right to drive or the right to vote – although considering the mess we sometimes make of our elections, perhaps that's not such a bad idea.

Animals enjoy the natural world without ruining it. All they need is to be able to take a drink of clean water, to be nourished, to have shelter from extreme weather, and to be left in peace. It isn't much to ask. Yet today, few animals have those vital things. The reason they don't have them is because human beings dominate the world and, to put it bluntly, enslave animals.

That may sound harsh, but think about it. If allowed to be themselves, animals are self-sufficient, whole, and vital. ... Animals don't despoil the waterways or woods, as humans do with our pop-top bottles and plastic bags, and, far worse, with the hog and chicken waste from our intensive farming systems. The Alaskan wilderness, which is often described as "uninhabited" and "unspoiled" has, in fact, always been heavily inhabited by billions of animals who have kept it pristine.

Although animals have wants and needs and behaviours of their own, they are often treated as nothing more than hamburgers, handbags, living test tubes, cheap burglar alarms, or amusement for human beings. They are not allowed to live their lives, but instead are forced to serve us, giving us carriage rides, performing silly tricks, and having their skin used for clothing. We use their flesh as food, despite knowing that we can eat far healthier food, and they are the surrogate tasters of our poisons.

I was inspired to form People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals after reading a book called *Animal Liberation*, written by the philosopher Peter Singer. Dr. Singer suggests that instead of just being kind to animals, which everyone knows one should be, we might try viewing animals as individuals like ourselves, as members of other cultures or, indeed, other nations ...

After all, animals are not inanimate objects; they are feeling beings who experience love and joy, loneliness and fear, in much, if not exactly, the same way we do. Although we have set ourselves up as gods who can do anything we please simply because we please, biologically we are but one animal among many. Many anthropologists believe that we have miscategorized ourselves as a separate class of animal (hominids) out of pure conceit, for now that we have unraveled the human genome, we see that we share 99 per cent of our DNA with other primates.

When we think about it, perhaps all that keeps us from treating the other animals with respect_the ultimate respect being to leave them in peace to do what they wish to do_is simple prejudice. Human beings have a sorry history of prejudice. Through the ages, our feelings of superiority have caused us to denigrate and abuse others we have felt were somehow less important or less intelligent than ourselves, instead of exercising magnanimity and protecting them ...

The questions for our generation, and for future generations, are: "Who are animals, what are we doing to them, and should we change, no matter how comfortable we may be in our old ways?"

Some members of our own species may have been to the moon, and some can split the atom, but there are many ways in which human talents pale in comparison to the animals' Our own military is still learning from dolphins, who use sonar not only to navigate, but also to stun their prey, and from bats who can find their way in total darkness. We cannot decipher animals' languages, but it is indisputable that they have them.

Monkeys have separate warnings to alert the troupe to a threat from the sky, such as a hawk, and a threat from the ground, such as a poisonous snake. Prairie dogs use different calls to signal the approach of a single human being, a friend and a foe. Whales sing their histories through the great oceans, adding new bits of information every year. Tree frogs drum their messages to others far away, while other frogs "hear" with their skin ... The turtle navigates by the Earth's magnetic field, and starlings read the heavens for direction. It was an albatross, not a man, who first circumnavigated the globe and knew the Earth was round. As for family values, geese mate for life, and a male will risk hunters' guns to stick by his injured [mate] when she is shot.

When people say, "But all that is just instinct," I wonder how they think we human beings select our own mates, the people we love. Is it by cold logic? ... I was working for the humane society when I first started thinking about animals in a different way. I was already familiar with the often terrible things that happen to dogs and cats and wildlife ...

One afternoon, a cruelty call took me to a barn littered with broken glass. A family had moved away. Leaving the animals behind. They were all dead except for one small pig. I lifted him up and held him in my arms, then gave him his first drink of water in perhaps a week. Then I bundled him off to the vet.

My job was to prosecute the people who had willfully caused this small animal's suffering, so I made sure that I dutifully collected all the evidence. But while driving home that night, I began to wonder what I could eat for dinner. Ah, I thought, conducting a mental inventory of the contents of my refrigerator, I have some pork chops. The penny dropped! I realized how inconsistent it was of me to be preparing to charge someone with a crime for abusing one little pig while paying someone else to hurt and kill the other little pig I was going to eat for dinner.

I had never been to a slaughterhouse then, but like most people, I knew that such a place must be appalling. Today I can tell you first-hand about the look in the eyes of the animals. As they are prodded and kicked along to their death, they can smell and hear and see what is already happening to those in front of them in the slaughter line. ... No animals wish to be killed and all of them_dogs and chickens and pigs_struggle fiercely to avoid the person with the knife. All are equally filled with fear.

It is perhaps awful to say, but the moment of death in the slaughterhouse may be the best part of these animals' lives. I say that because to satisfy the tastes of so many people who crave chicken wings and burgers, animals raised for meat have a truly wretched existence. They are castrated and dehorned, have their tails amputated and their beaks seared off with a hot wire, all without benefit of anaesthetics.

Calves are separated from their loving mothers soon after birth so that the milk meant for these baby animals can become cheese and ice cream and the calf can be raised for veal. After weeks in darkness, the calves stumble down the same ramp their mother will walk when their lives are considered insufficiently profitable. Animals on factory farms are crowded together in enormous numbers. Pigs must breathe in the ammonia from their own waste, collected in troughs beneath their pens. They suffer blackened lungs and have difficulty breathing, and their limbs become infected with open sores from lying on the hard cement.

Undercover video footage shot by PETA shows pigs routinely clubbed with iron gateposts and beaten to death with claw hammers. The lame are thrown in and out of trucks, and in bitter winter weather, the pigs' sensitive flesh freezes to the sides of the metal truck body.

"Broiler chickens" are bred to be so top-heavy that the bones in their legs splinter and they spend much of their lives in chronic pain. In the egg factories, chickens can never stretch a wing or find room to lie down. When their laying life is over, they are stuffed into crates so roughly that their wings often fracture. The dying are afforded no care. Sometimes you may pass a transport truck and see them looking out through the slats, their eyes filled with despair. What we do to them is neither "civilized" nor humane.

In 1981, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals embarked on its first investigation. One of us took a job in a laboratory in Silver Spring, Maryland, where a group of macaque monkeys was kept. The monkeys had been taken as babies from their homes and families in the Philippines. The nerves in their spines had been cut, and this affected their ability to control their arms. The cages in which they were kept were rarely cleaned; in fact, they were so filthy that fecal matter rose to a height of a couple of inches in some places and fungus grew on it.

The experimenter didn't bother to give the monkeys food bowls so when their food was thrown into their cages, the pellets fell through the wires and landed in the waste collection trays below. The monkeys would have to pick the food pellets out of these trays in order to eat. The animals' limbs were also injured from getting caught in the

rusted and broken wires, and the monkeys had lost a great deal of their hair from malnutrition. The researcher had converted a small refrigerator onto a shock box, and inside it, the monkeys were punished if they failed to pick up objects with their damaged limbs.

We persuaded the police to do something unprecedented: to serve a search warrant on the laboratory and remove the monkeys. Seeing the faces of those monkeys turned up to the sunlight for the first time in many years as they came out of the lab encouraged people to seek alternatives to animal use.

Scientists and laypeople wondered aloud whether it was morally right to experiment on animals at all and whether, indeed, it was scientifically valid to do so. Some physicians ... began clamoring for funding for human epidemiological studies, the cloning of human skin, and computer technology that can bring quick and directly applicable results.

When PETA started, most cosmetics, toiletries, and household products such as oven cleaner were still tested on animals. Today, more than 550 product companies have switched to using human skin patch tests, computer assays, and corneas from eye banks, from gathering guinea pig data to analyzing human data. The arguments that animals must be used faded into oblivion because consumers refused to buy the products until the companies changed.

The current challenge is to shift agencies, like the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, away from animal use. The most common toxicity tests still in use take a substance, like weedkiller or mustard gas, the effects of which we have long known from tragic human experience, and force-feed that substance to rabbits. ... No painkillers are given as substances like septic tank cleaner are smeared onto the animals' abraded skin to see how much flesh they corrode, the results being crudely recorded. Chemicals are also placed in animals' eyes and forced into animals' lungs. When enough people protest, this will stop ...

Most people, when shown how their actions contribute to cruelty and given options, will make compassionate choices. In the U.S. alone, while the demand for cheap flesh for the table results in the suffering of more than 9 billion animals each year_that's 1 million animals eaten every hour_the number of vegetarians is growing rapidly ...

PETA's message is that each one of us is a vital player in life's great orchestra. Every day, our choices help perpetuate or stop needless violence. ... I ask that you please join us in making the world a less violent place for all living beings.

Thank you.