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“Are We Smart Enough to Know When to Take the Political Turn for Animals?”

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Are We Smart Enough to Know When to Take the Political Turn for Animals?

1. Protests in the Primaries

The 2016 presidential election in the United States had its share of street theatre, but not all was attributable to Donald Trump. Early on in the primaries, on March 30, three protestors from the animal rights organisation Direct Action Everywhere (DxE) interrupted US Senator and Democratic candidate Bernie Sanders while he spoke at a town hall meeting in Kenosha, Wisconsin.¹ This was one of a small number of protests targeting Sanders by DxE.

A YouTube video showed the protestors holding a banner declaring “Animal Liberation Now.” They shouted that Sanders once said, “The greatness of a nation¹ is measured by how it treats its most vulnerable,” but claimed that Sanders — who campaigned as a “Democratic socialist” — continued to “ignore the most vulnerable in our society,” meaning nonhuman animals.

The protestors eventually were drowned out by the crowd’s hand-clapping and chanting of “Bernie! Bernie! Bernie!” From the stage, Sanders gestured for the protestors to sit down. The activists eventually went silent but continued to make the banner visible to as many people as possible. The crowd cheered when the banner was torn down and security escorted the protestors from the auditorium.

In “Why Vegans Are Protesting Bernie Sanders Rallies,” published on Munchies, a website “dedicated to food and its global purpose,” Nick Woods wrote about Matt Johnson, one of the DxE protestors.² Johnson has been a “vegetarian since he was four-years-old, and vegan for the last three — no small feat for a trucker born and bred in ‘the leading state for hog,’ as he describes it.”

¹ “The greatness of a nation and its moral progress can be judged by the way its animals are treated” is widely attributed to Mahatma Gandhi but it is not found in his works.

“Matt sees the Kenosha protest not as an affront to the Sanders campaign,” the article continues,

but a comment on alleged, deeply ingrained animal exploitation in American culture. He says the aim is to first get the issue on the table, and prevent it from being forgotten or silenced. Sanders, he says, as a progressive leader, needs to be held accountable for his support of farmers who slaughter animals, or contribute to their slaughter for food.

A MoveOn.com petition urged Sanders to “End your support for one of the most violent and corrupt industries in the world and commit, as a presidential nominee, to cutting all subsidies for animal agriculture!”³

The Democratic frontrunner and ultimate nominee, Hillary Clinton, was the subject of a similar action. At a campaign stop in Las Vegas in August, a small group of DxE protestors interrupted a rally by chanting and holding signs that read, “Until Every Animal is Free.” Clinton did not address their concerns directly but stopped her speech to say, “Apparently these people are here to protest [Republican nominee Donald] Trump because Trump and his kids have killed a lot of animals. Thank you for making that point.”⁴ She was referencing Trumps’ two sons, who have been photographed on big game hunts in Africa.⁵ The activists, however, were referencing an open letter they issued to Clinton asking her to end subsidies to meat producers.⁶ Trump was not the focus of any DxE protests, although one DxE protestor briefly interrupted a rally held by Republican presidential candidate Ted Cruz.⁷

That these incidents occurred, and that they were covered by the mainstream American media amid a host of more human-centered campaign topics, raises the issue of how (and, indeed, whether) nonhuman animals are represented and discussed in world politics.

2. The Key Questions to Ask

As an animal rights activist and theorist with more than 40 years of personal commitment as a vegan and professional involvement with the international animal rights movement, I reflect upon the idea of a “political turn for animals.” I understand its current meaning is to describe how the discussion of nonhumans in literature and debates is moving from ethics to political theory. But a theory is only as good as it is in practice. The political turn for animals has to be more than just theory; it must be also about the practice of animal advocacy. I wonder whether there is a *grand narrative* in animal rights advocacy to be found here. Have we reached a point in the social justice road where there is a sign that says, “This way to take the political turn for animals”?

At times it appears that the movement is gaining speed down the road toward our epic destination of freeing all species from the subjugation of our own. The goal is to secure moral rights for nonhuman animals and for that generally accepted wisdom and practice to be encoded into law as legal rights with meaningful and effective enforcement. But there are also times when I think we have slammed the movement into reverse and are hurtling backwards as fast and as far as we can go back up that road. There are even times when I think we do the impossible and go in opposite directions simultaneously. We stand still with the movement’s wheels spinning up nothing but smoke.

Reading about DxE’s protests against Sanders felt like one of those times. The activists were pushing the humane movement forward in the sense that Sanders had a good-but-could-be-better position on animal rights. But the protests pushed the movement backwards because it wasted an opportunity to work with a sympathetic presidential candidate who had the potential to become even more outspoken on animal rights.

Sanders is, of course, a public figure. He is a long-standing US senator, and generated strong support as a US presidential candidate. The official Sanders website, BernieSanders.org,⁸ did not include any official statements regarding animal protection. However, another website,⁹ FeelTheBern.org (“built and maintained by volunteers with no official relation to Bernie Sanders”), did. It

stated, “Even though livestock animals are raised specifically for consumption, we have an ethical responsibility to make sure they are raised humanely.”¹⁰ This worthy but vacuous statement substantiates Johnson’s claim that Sanders’ view of animal rights is not even “on the table.”

To his credit, Sanders received a 100% rating in the Humane Scorecard for the 113th Congress published by the Humane Society Legislative Fund (HSLF), the animal protection lobbying organisation.¹¹ But the Open Secrets website, published by the Centre for Responsive Politics (a nonpartisan, non-profit organisation that tracks money in US politics) also reported that Sanders’ presidential campaign received \$318,579 in contributions from US agribusiness.¹² Agribusiness is, of course, responsible for killing more than 9 billion nonhuman animals annually.¹³

Further, agribusiness is a major actor in the animal industrial complex (see 3. The Animal Industrial Complex), the collective term used to describe the many traditions, institutions, and industries that transform nonhuman animals into products and services for human consumption.¹⁴

Sociologist Richard Twine describes the animal industrial complex as a

partially opaque network of relations between governments, public and private science, and the corporate agricultural sector. Within the three nodes of the complex are multiple intersecting levels and it is sustained by an ideology that naturalises the human as a consumer of other animals. It encompasses an extraordinary wide range of practices, technologies, identities and markets.¹⁵

It is, of course, disappointing that Sanders appears not to understand animal rights more than he does. Further, as the self-proclaimed progressive presidential candidate, Sanders should recognise the animal industrial complex (particularly intensive animal agriculture) for its frequent mistreatment of its workforce, who are often undocumented migrant workers; the environmental

pollution that it causes; its health threats to human consumers; and its inhumane practices toward nonhuman animals.

Hillary Clinton's official campaign website¹⁶ did have a section called "Protecting Animals and Wildlife" in which she posted statements related to her general positions on wildlife trafficking, horse slaughter, regulating puppy mills, and "encouraging farms to raise nonhuman animals humanely." When she was a US Senator from New York, she was "proud to have earned a perfect score on the Humane Society's scorecard in the 108th and 109th Congresses."¹⁷

DxE believed Sanders and Clinton were legitimate targets for animal rights protests, but were they correct to challenge the candidates the way they did? The key questions to ask are: What would have been the most effective animal rights message to the candidates? How should it have been delivered? Did the protests bring ethics and politics together to further the political turn for animals, as part of a movement-wide strategy to making society's treatment of animals a mainstream political issue?

DxE failed, in my opinion, on all counts to answer these questions correctly. The DxE protests represent one of many conflicts I see often in the animal rights movement as it struggles to gain wider acceptance. It is an example of when the movement goes in opposite directions simultaneously. *Yes* to raising animal rights within the mainstream political arena. *No* to publicly confronting potentially sympathetic candidates and alienating potential public support. The rules of engagement within the mainstream political arena are different from those generally in society.

Elections, including for US presidents, provide opportunities for the country to discuss the state of the nation and its future. Such public discourse, regardless of whether it is at the community, county, city, state, or national level, is a necessary process in a functional democracy. Democracies can be only as robust as their citizens engage with the democratic process, including participation in political parties, social movements, and other relevant institutions.

Whereas it was good to see DxE engaged in the presidential campaign, how they went about it was bad. Which leads me to the next question: Is the animal rights movement ready to grow beyond being a moral crusade and take the political turn for animals as a full-fledged social movement?

3. The Animal Industrial Complex

Notwithstanding formidable challenges to accomplishing its mission to free all species from the subjugation of one, the animal rights movement is making progress with what can be viewed as short-term victories. However, in the long-term, it is failing generally and significantly to decrease the number of nonhuman animals consumed; persuade sufficient numbers of people to go vegan; convince governments to pass meaningful animal protection legislation; and challenge fundamentally society's attitudes toward other animals. Establishing moral and legal rights for nonhuman animals are currently beyond the reach of the present animal rights movement.

The movement's primary strategy of emphasising personal lifestyle choice (short-term), as opposed to more wholesale policy change (long-term), is no match for the animal industrial complex. Institutionalised animal exploitation is fundamentally different from individual acts of animal cruelty. They are principally for financial gain, which is why they are difficult to stop. Generally, public policy and legislation (and its enforcement) as it relates to other animals reflects the dominant culture's view that nonhuman animals exist for human purposes. This instrumental use is codified into law by designating nonhuman animals as property rather than as independent, sentient beings with their own self-interests and legal standing. Various justifications are made in defence of this exploitation (e.g., feeding people, curing disease, entertainment, education) but this wholesale use of nonhuman animals is increasingly regarded as questionable or unnecessary and harmful to public health. Further, the emerging market of vegan, cruelty-free products and services demonstrates that economically viable alternatives are increasingly available.

The animal industrial complex has a self-interest in overstating the benefits to its exploitation of nonhuman animals. Its component corporations manipulate public opinion to fear any change in their use of nonhuman animals. It is doubtful that all of the products and services derived from animal exploitation are essential for human survival. People may not be aware of the existence of the animal industrial complex per se, but as consumers they use its products and services as the food they eat, the clothes they wear, and the medications they take.

Of course, when asked about animal rights, many people are going to express concern about giving up any pleasure (e.g., eating meat) or losing any benefit (e.g., safe products) they may feel is their prerogative. But the deeper people's understanding, particularly of practices considered egregious (e.g., wearing fur or watching orca shows), the less fear there is of losing pleasure or benefit. Sympathy for other animals, when they are particularly cruelly treated and where there is a willingness to forgo any perceived or real human benefits, is demonstrated in the public's slowly growing support for animal rights.

The dominance of the animal industrial complex is actually emboldened by the animal rights movement and its narrow emphasis on personal lifestyle choices. Corporations that profit from animal exploitation occasionally accommodate symbolic demands made by the animal rights movement to end the egregious use of animals. While these developments deserve recognition, they are accomplished without any real obligation imposed on the animal industrial complex to end its institutionalised violence toward animals. These companies can sometimes take advantage of the opportunities for new markets in consumerism by touting incremental husbandry improvements (e.g., cage-free, pasture-raised, fewer hormones) without significantly improving the lives of the animals they continue to exploit. Although welfare changes are welcomed, they can also have the effect of weakening the animal rights movement's larger imperative for demanding moral and legal rights for animals by ensuring that

many forms of animal exploitation (e.g., eating meat, using certain cosmetics) remain as personal lifestyle choices.

While genuine cooperation between the animal rights movement and the animal industrial complex is an important strategy to end animal exploitation, the former must avoid being used by the latter, even unwittingly, to legitimise or even perpetuate institutional animal exploitation. The emergence of the so-called “humane economy”¹⁸ that is enabling consumers to no longer rely upon products and services manufactured from some of the more egregious areas of animal exploitation by purchasing instead humane or non-animal alternatives is generally a positive development and to be welcomed. Nonetheless, I believe the notion of a humane economy further perpetuates the idea that it is possible to end institutional animal exploitation by only voluntarily, and incrementally, changing one’s lifestyle.

Political and consumer campaigns which call for public policy to end animal exploitation have been shown to mobilise strong resistance from the animal industrial complex to protect its profitable use of animals. For example, commercial agricultural interests in various states in the US have used their vast financial resources to lobby legislators to pass so-called anti-whistleblower “ag-gag” laws which criminalise individuals who document animal exploitation in factory farms. The US Congress passed the Animal Enterprise Protection Act in 1992 and the Animal Enterprise Terrorism Act in 2006 to protect the interests of factory farms and laboratories and their economically dependent businesses, including breeders and cage manufacturers. The enormous profits made from animal exploitation are zealously protected by existing relationships with governments and their regulatory mechanisms. The animal industrial complex has a documented history of collusion with private security forces and state law enforcement to monitor, pervert and harm the animal rights movement, including the infiltration of activist groups by law enforcement officers and/or informants.¹⁹

It is therefore not surprising that nonhuman animal-related public policy is more about protecting human and corporate interests than protecting animal welfare. Animal researchers (not anti-vivisectionists) and animal farmers (not vegans) are far more likely to be represented in the policy-making networks which determine regulations and laws governing the use of nonhuman animals. This unsatisfactory state of affairs is due in large part to our understanding of animal rights as a narrowly defined moral crusade and not as a wider social movement with a political mission and strategic objectives.

4. Animal Rights as a Social Movement

Sociologists Jeff Goodwin and James M. Jasper define social movements as a “collective, organised, sustained, and non-institutional challenge to authorities, power holders, or cultural beliefs and practices.”²⁰ By that definition, the modern animal rights movement is a social movement in terms of being collectively organized and sustained, but it has yet to effectively develop the capacity for challenging authority in the political mainstream, as full-fledged social movements do. By limiting its focus primarily to individual lifestyle choices, the movement has not graduated to the level of effectively addressing large-scale institutional change as a public policy issue.

Moral crusades are a type of social movement that frame specific issues as exclusive causes with extraordinary meaning. They may be religious or political campaigns or similar initiatives which embed a spiritual, political or moral belief as an integral component. They address fundamental and profound issues relating to human activity, including the relationship humans have with their perception of themselves and their place in society. Moral crusades rely upon campaigns which trigger moral shocks to provoke public outrage; for example, efforts to ban keeping so-called “dangerous dogs” rely upon sensational media coverage of attacks by certain types of dogs on defenceless people (often children). Such extraordinary situations or conflicts may even be characterized as moral panics because of their exaggerated sense of urgency.

An example of moral crusades were, literally, the Crusades from the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries, which were military campaigns organised by the Catholic Church in support of Christianity in the Middle East. Another moral crusade occurred in the US during the 1920s, when advocates of Prohibition made it virtually illegal to sell, and often consume, alcohol.

Contemporary moral crusades are often contentious issues that relate to lifestyle choice (e.g., alcohol consumption and recreational or illegal drug use), sexual activity (e.g., pornography, homosexuality, monogamy) or issues of individual health or freedom (e.g., abortion, euthanasia, death penalty).

Social movements, including animal rights, are accused routinely of seeking change which will adversely impact society if they achieve their objective. But if it were, very little social and/or economic progress could have been made over the centuries if lasting harm resulted from social change. Such exaggerated negative consequences rarely, if ever, turn out to be true. For example, opponents of marriage equality laws claimed legal marriage and civil partnerships for gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgendered people would result in the collapse of heterosexual marriage as an institution, yet that has not been the case.

Even though moral crusades mean different things to different people, it is not unreasonable, if not entirely correct, to view the animal rights movement as one. Certainly, the animal rights movement behaves like a moral crusade with its emphasis on personal lifestyle choice and with such calls to action as “Go vegan!” or “Go cruelty-free!” For it to function as a more comprehensive social movement, it must also challenge the laws and policies that allow nonhuman animals to be raised for food or used for research in the first place.

5. Challenges and Key Differences

Notwithstanding my earlier criticism, the modern animal rights movement has increased public awareness about animal exploitation; encouraged people to

live cruelty-free lifestyles, particularly as vegetarians and vegans; persuaded corporations, charities, non-governmental organisations, churches, and other entities like them to adopt various pro-animal policies; and lobby local, national, and international governments and their agencies to implement regulations and pass laws limiting or prohibiting some animal use.

But the challenges that other exclusively human-based moral crusades have confronted (e.g, civil rights) are clearly different from those which the animal rights movement faces. The animal rights movement asks that members of one species should change thousands of years of custom and practice regarding its relationship with all other species — a challenge of unprecedented scale. This presents unique challenges with regard to achieving political change for animals as opposed to simply elevating their moral status.

The animal industrial complex defends and promotes its continued use of nonhuman animals in science, agriculture, and other industries by claiming that any interests these nonhuman animals may have must always be subordinate to human interests. This frames human and nonhuman interests as a competition, or at the least a source of serious, repeated, or even irreconcilable conflict. This is a strategic dichotomy prevalent in human history: men are superior to women; whites are superior to non-whites; heterosexuals are superior to homosexuals; and so on.

The idea that humans are inherently superior to all nonhuman animals is a concept which author and philosopher Peter Singer defined as “speciesism.”²¹ Human/nonhuman conflicts are fundamentally rooted in speciesism¹¹ because human interests, and their resulting cultural and economic constructs, inevitably prevail because nonhumans have no legal standing and no political voice of their own. As society evolves, however, and we become aware of our superiority prejudices, we can seek to resolve them as we become more aware of the resulting injustices. We readjust, accommodate, and move on — in all likelihood, the better for it.

¹¹ Richard D. Ryder is attributed to first defining ‘speciesism’ as a word.

The same, no doubt, will be true for animal rights, particularly when it is understood that to feed the world's population and promote better health, animal exploitation in agriculture and science are fundamentally problematic. For example, concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs), or factory farms, are designed to raise the maximum number of "production units" (nonhuman animals) with little or no regard for individual well-being and minimal humane oversight. This is profitable for the meat industry, but animal agriculture has been cited as the single most contributor to greenhouse gas production and climate change, which adversely affects the planet's human population.²² Animal research and testing are conducted on millions of nonhuman animals, more than 90 percent of whom are rats and mice given no federal legal protection. But scientists have long argued that extrapolating results from non-human subjects to human patients is tenuous at best and dangerous at worst. In both science and agriculture, exploiting millions of nonhuman animals can backfire on the human beings who have created this speciesist paradigm. These vast numbers of nonhuman animals are, as Wolfson noted, "beyond the law."²³ This is why it is vital for the animal rights movement to reframe itself to be not only a moral crusade but also a larger social movement that challenges the political status quo and not just personal lifestyle decisions.

All social movements face significant challenges, internally (e.g., limited resources) and externally (e.g., disinterested public and unsympathetic media). But two key differences add significantly to the challenges of the animal rights movement, making its mission even more daunting and its accomplishments even more impressive.

The first of the two key differences speaks to the nature of social movements and their protagonists and beneficiaries. Often, social movements are populated and supported by those whose self-interests are at stake. Their protagonists are the agents of their own change; they seek legal status withheld from them usually because of a prejudice embedded in society. They wish to remedy wrongs committed against them, or improve their well-being and legal

standing. However, in the animal rights movement, the protagonists are mobilised by the interests of beneficiaries who are not even the same species. These beneficiaries — all nonhuman animals who are instrumentally used by humans — are unable to form their own social movement to advance their own agenda. The protagonists who seek animal rights come from the one species that oppresses all others. The animal rights movement is not the only social movement whose beneficiaries are not the protagonists and not the same species — those who advocate for the environment do so on behalf of both plant and nonhuman animal species. But it can be argued that environmental advocates do benefit from biodiversity or cleaner air and water, so their actions are not entirely altruistic. Animal rights advocates do seek benefits for members of other species with no expected or even implied benefit for themselves.

The second key difference between the animal rights movement and all other social movements is the question of the benefits enjoyed by humans from exploiting nonhumans. Although there are benefits to humans from liberating nonhuman animals from our exploitation (e.g., better health from a plant-based diet), the common perception of animal rights is that, if it is accomplished, it would adversely impact human interests (e.g., farmers put out of business or fewer drugs to fight disease). Animal rights requires humans to relinquish all benefits gained from nonhuman animal exploitation, regardless of whatever possible harm it may cause to humans. It is customary among social movements that any benefits gained by protagonists, and enjoyed by them as beneficiaries, also brings some benefits to others with minimal impact or cost to society. For example, when smoking was banned in most restaurants and offices, nonsmoking patrons benefitted but so did the waitstaff.

Because of these two key differences, animal advocates need to persuade people of the value of changing their hearts and minds as well as their lifestyles, with respect to their relations with other animals. Further, the benefits to be accrued from this change in attitudes toward nonhumans must be carefully framed to reveal their full extent. Not only will they end nonhuman animal

cruelty and exploitation, but they will also bring advantages to ourselves and the environment we live in.

The personal transformative moment²⁴ is the currency of the animal rights movement, which seeks to foment in others similar conversion experiences. For many people, the moral shock strikes at the heart of how they see themselves and their world. It is a personally transformative moment (e.g., watching a video, visiting a website, talking to a friend, rescuing an animal) that hastens uncomfortable and hitherto hidden realisations. Indeed, *personal change* changes one person at a time, but *institutional change* changes all of society. The fault line between success and failure for the animal rights movement lies in understanding the difference between personal change and institutional change; or, in other words, the difference between a moral crusade (inspired by self-interests) and a social movement (inspired by benefits for many).

By emphasising personal lifestyle choice over institutional change, the animal rights movement pursues a strategy which is not fit for purpose and impedes severely its ability to achieve institutional change. A new strategy with equal emphasis on action at the level of the individual and society is needed. Only then will the animal rights movement be in a better position to achieve its mission and confront the animal industrial complex.

Framing animal rights as a social movement emphasises a strategy which expands from the individual to society — an approach that includes public policy, legislation, and law enforcement and not just personal lifestyle choices. This difference in strategy is reflected in how its mission is viewed. Generally, animal rights is seen as a demand for individual lifestyle change. In contrast, as a social movement, the animal rights mission calls for the transformation of society and its relations with other animals.

6. Theory and Practice

At the RSPCA's Rights of Animals symposium at Trinity College Cambridge in 1976, I heard Lord Houghton of Sowerby challenge the UK animal rights movement to be less like a moral crusade and more like a social movement:

My message is that animal welfare, in the general and in the particular, is largely a matter for the law. This means that to Parliament we must go. Sooner or later that is where we will *have* to go. That is where laws are made and where the penalties for disobedience and the measures for enforcement are laid down. There is no complete substitute for the law. Public opinion, though invaluable and indeed essential, is not the law. Public opinion is what makes laws possible and observance widely acceptable.²⁵

Between World War Two and his death in 1996, Lord Houghton played a prominent role in British politics as an elected Member of Parliament, government Minister, Parliamentary Labour Party Chair, and member of the House of Lords. He was an experienced political authority who provided much needed leadership to the nascent animal rights movement.

Although he did not frame his remarks in the context of my five stage analysis of social movements (see 7. The Five Stages of Social Movements), Lord Houghton's emphasis on Parliament and the law as the essential and unavoidable stage for institutional change supports the position that the animal rights movement should aspire to, and act like, a social movement.

The Rights of Animals symposium was a significant event as it brought together philosophers, politicians, veterinarians, theologians, and advocates in an unprecedented discussion on animal ethics and animal advocacy at an early point in the history of the modern animal rights movement. Activists and philosophers may not, at first impression, make complementary traveling companions; but the animal rights movement demonstrates why both advocates and academics are needed to inspire and inform the larger society. Leading philosophers, psychologists, and theologians (e.g., Andrew Linzey, Tom Regan, Richard D. Ryder, Peter Singer) were actively engaged in the formative years of

the animal rights movement. And animal rights, like other social movements-in-the-making, has enjoyed complementary advocacy and academic flanks (e.g., the feminist movement and women's studies) as it has evolved, including animal law, animal studies, and, animal welfare science.

The three most commonly known traditions in animal ethics are utilitarianism, natural rights, and ecofeminism.

The utilitarian perspective is generally associated with Peter Singer's *Animal Liberation*, in which he states:

If a being suffers there can be no moral justification for refusing to take that suffering into consideration. No matter what the nature of the being, the principle of equality requires that its suffering be counted equally with the like suffering—insofar as rough comparisons can be made—of any other being. If a being is not capable of suffering, or of experiencing enjoyment or happiness, there is nothing to be taken into account. So the limit of sentience (using the term as a convenient if not strictly accurate shorthand for the capacity to suffer and/or experience enjoyment) is the only defensible boundary of concern for the interests of others. To mark this boundary by some other characteristic like intelligence or rationality would be to mark it in an arbitrary manner. Why not choose some other characteristic, like skin colour?²⁶

In 1983 Tom Regan published *The Case for Animal Rights*, which rejected utilitarianism as insufficient in protecting the interests of other animals and advanced instead the natural rights view. Animals, Regan argued, have

certain basic moral rights, including in particular the fundamental right to be treated with respect that, as possessors of inherent value, they are due as a matter of strict justice. Like us, therefore . . . they must never be treated as mere receptacles of intrinsic values (e.g., pleasure, or preference-satisfaction), and any harm that is done to them must be

consistent with the recognition of their equal inherent value and their equal *prima facie* right not to be harmed.²⁷

Animals are “subjects of a life,” Regan argued, with their own individual biographies, and are therefore no more our property than other humans are objects for us to use as we wish, even if that use did not involve suffering.

Both Regan and Singer were at pains to argue that one could make claims on behalf of other animals that were not founded in emotion or sentiment. In other words, you did not have to “love” or even like nonhuman animals to recognise — through logic and reason — that it was intrinsically wrong to harm them.

In the 1980s and 1990s, ecofeminist scholars such as Marti Kheel (1948–2011), Lori Gruen, and Carol J. Adams began to contest the notion that our feelings for other animals were irrelevant in making the case for why we should not abuse them. They argued that a feminist ethic of care is

an alternative to the rights-based justice accounts that had dominated discussions within the academy and in social justice movements. Though many feminists saw ‘care’ as a necessary complement to ‘justice,’ the justice/care debate was often framed in binary terms, where our responsibilities and motivations were seen as a matter of justice or as a function of our capacities to care. Ecofeminists identify dualistic thinking (that creates inferior others and upholds certain forms of privilege as in the human/animal, man/woman, culture/ nature, mind/body dualism) as one of the factors that undergirds oppression and distorts our relationships with the earth and other animals.²⁸

Further to animal ethics, there is also in the academy the development of animal welfare science in the biological and veterinary sciences and animal studies (or human-animal studies) in the social sciences and humanities (as well as critical animal studies). These disciplines indicate significant changes are

underway, specifically in the academy but also more broadly in society, to explore and understand the “compromise and concealment” in our relations with other animals.^{III}

Two further related developments are animals and the law and animals and political theory. In the US, animal law is enjoying significant growth in research and litigation; the study of animals and political theory is less developed, and although there are indications that this is changing,²⁹ it has not yet materialized into a political turn for animals.

For many years, Robert Garner stood out as the primary political theorist exploring the political status of nonhuman animals.³⁰ His current research considers society’s treatment of other animals within the context of justice and the application of ideal and non-ideal theory to animal ethics with respect to legislation related to regulating and ending animal suffering.³¹ New research on the political theory of animal rights is also led by Alasdair Cochrane, Dan Lyons, Siobhan O’Sullivan, and Kimberley K. Smith.³² But the publication of *Zoopolis: A Political Theory of Animal Rights* by Sue Donaldson and Will Kymlicka stands out as a key moment, as it provided a critical evaluation of the modern animal rights movement and a new approach to establishing moral and legal rights for animals by applying citizenship political theory to animals.

“But what surely is clear after 180 years of organised animal advocacy,” they wrote, “is that we have made no demonstrable progress towards dismantling the system of animal exploitation.”³³

Our varied relationship with animals has its own moral complexities which have, in turn, political consequences, Donaldson and Kymlicka argue.

^{III} Thomas, Keith. 1983. *Man and the Natural World*. New York: Pantheon Books. p. 303. “A mixture of compromise and concealment has so far prevented this conflict from having to be fully resolved. But the issue cannot be completely evaded and it can be relied upon to recur. It is one of the contradictions upon which modern civilisation may be said to rest. About its ultimate consequences we can only speculate.”

Some animals should be seen as forming separate sovereign communities on their own territories (animals in the wild vulnerable to human invasion and colonization); some animals are akin to migrants or denizens who choose to move into areas of human habitation (liminal opportunistic animals); and some animals should be seen as full citizens of the polity because of the way they've been bred over generations for interdependence with humans (domesticated animals).³⁴

The work of Donaldson and Kymlicka and other political theorists who are exploring new ways to understand the moral and legal status of nonhuman animals is central to the development of public policy and its implementation. It is one thing to claim *moral rights* for animals; it is something else to successfully organize and persuade society (and its representational governments) to recognise and defend *legal rights* for animals. That is to say, the question of how fundamentalism meets *real politik*. Indeed, the animal rights movement as a fledgling social movement is not alone in struggling under the tension between abolition and regulation, or in failing to resolve them successfully.³⁵ Frequently, this tension is framed as an exclusive choice. I do not support this view. Both are needed to achieve change. The challenge is to learn how to direct movement strategies simultaneously and complementarily while pursuing both. Animal rights is (or should be) more than just a moral crusade pursuing idealistic goals of abolition. It should function as a pragmatic social movement working to embed the values of animal rights into public policy.³⁶ The animal rights movement can successfully chart its way through these turbulent waters with an understanding of how public education leads to public acceptance.

7. The Five Stages of Social Movements

In his book, *Eco-Wars*, political scientist Ronald T. Libby discusses an analysis of the animal rights movement by Bill Rempel, a research scientist in animal agribusiness at the Department of Animal Science at the University of Minnesota.³⁷ Rempel makes the case that the agriculture industry's perception of the political influence of animal rights groups passes through four stages. His four stages of the animal rights movement are (1) developing an issue; (2)

politicising the issue; (3) legislating the issue; (4) litigating the issue. From my experience with the animal rights movement, I conclude he was partially correct. Therefore, I have adapted it to the following five stages.

1. Public education, when people are enlightened about the issue and embrace it into their lives
2. Public policy development, when political parties, businesses, schools, professional associations and other entities that constitute society adopt sympathetic positions on the issue
3. Legislation, when laws are passed on the issue
4. Implementation, when laws and other public policy instruments are enforced on the issue
5. Public acceptance, when the issue is embedded into the values of society

This is the progression of a successful social movement as it emerges from obscurity into acceptance. The five-stage analysis makes it possible to determine which stage is reached, what is next, and why some organisations and issues fail, stagnate or succeed. The five-stage analysis can also evaluate individual or single objectives and how their strategies are pursued. Most issues start in stage one and expand to the others, but not always in a clear sequential order. Movements, like life, can be very complicated; not everything fits neatly into any analysis, and simplistic schemes are problematic when many influences are in motion. Nevertheless, they help to determine where we have come from and where we go from here.

For any social movement to achieve its mission, it must pass through each of the five stages and maintain an active engagement in each one. In doing so, its ability to resist setbacks, obstacles, and opposition from opponents is diminished increasingly. In other words, as a social movement expands its presence in each stage while maintaining activities in each one, the power and control that any opposition may wield against it is further weakened.

For example, the gay rights movement in the US used public education (through scientific definitions and personal narratives) to counter the stigma of homosexuality as being “unnatural” or “dangerous.” Its supporters organized to push for political change to end discriminatory laws and to demand equal protection under the US Constitution, which resulted in the legalization of same-sex marriage nationwide. [citation?] Today, public opinion polls show that a majority of Americans support same-sex marriage, a drastic change from only a decade ago.

These same five stages illustrate the transition animal advocates must make from moral crusaders to political activists, to transform the animal rights movement from a moral crusade to an effective social movement. This analysis also shows the need for a variety of organisations with differing approaches. For example, general campaigning organisations (e.g., In Defense of Animals, IFAW, PETA) are needed to be active in Stages One and Two, along with specialist campaigning organisations such as United Poultry Concerns. This is not to suggest that these groups are not also present in Stages Three and Four, as some of their work may also fit this description; however, the organisations specialising in law and public policy (e.g., Animal Legal Defence Fund, Humane Society Legislative Fund, Nonhuman Rights Project) are those who will be most active here and not in public education.

As a whole, the modern animal rights movement has not fully progressed beyond the public education phase of Stage One. True, it has some presence in public policy, legislation, and enforcement (Stages Two through Four), but I think most animal advocates feel more comfortable in the moral crusade (stages one and two) than as part of a social movement (Stages Three and Four). This is likely because a) they are comfortable drawing from their personal transformative moments to talk about their own personal experiences (going vegan, buying cruelty-free products) but are not well-versed in formal political organizing, b) not enough activists understand that just sharing educational information with other individuals (who might make their own personal transformations) will tip the balance for institutional change the way that formal political action can, and c) we generally live as passive consumers untaught and

unskilled in knowing how to achieve social justice. It is easier to make a cardboard sign and stand outside a fur salon to protest for an hour than it is to collect signatures, lobby legislators, or put pro-animal initiatives on a ballot.

We can never assume that a growing collective of personal lifestyle change automatically leads to institutional, societal change. The capriciousness of human nature is subject to change. Institutionalised regulations and laws are much more entrenched expressions of society's values. Unfortunately, the animal industrial complex is deeply ingrained and fully engaged in all five stages, which is why much of the public debate and legislation relating to nonhuman animals is about the parameters of how they can be used and not the abolition of practices or protecting other animals from violence. Those who represent the animal industrial complex remain in positions of power and influence; they control the public policy debate about the moral and legal status of other animals. Nonhuman animals are still principally viewed as property, and therefore are disposable commodities in public policy.

8. At the Political Crossroads

Nonhuman animals can neither join a moral crusade nor organise their own social movement. Unlike humans, they cannot be the agency of their own liberation. Further, nonhuman animals are not the problem. They do not choose to subject themselves to the cruelty and exploitation we inflict upon them. We are the problem. And we are the solution. We can only stop institutionalised violence to nonhuman animals and award rights to them *if we want to*.

Nonhuman animals are already in the political arena, except their representatives are allied with powerful commercial interests—the animal industrial complex—to ensure that animal exploitation continues for as long as possible, even when non-animal products, services, and options are available. The involvement of powerful commercial interests in the political process helps to maintain the status quo, to make sure that any regulations or laws protect their interest in using animals rather than further our interest (and the animals' interest) in not being used at all.

Notwithstanding significant challenges and noteworthy accomplishments, the impact to date of the modern animal rights movement on society's relationship with animals is limited. The present reliance upon a strategy emphasising personal lifestyle choice appeals only to a small minority. For example, in a public opinion poll commissioned by the Vegan Society in the UK in partnership with *Vegan Life* magazine, it was found that only 1.05% of the age 15 and over population was vegan.³⁸ Although this was reported in the media as an "increase of over 350% over the past decade, making veganism one of Britain's fastest growing lifestyle movements," I had hoped that after 40 years of the modern animal rights movement, which includes vegan advocacy as one of its primary recommendations for action, that the number was higher.³⁹ A poll commissioned by the Vegetarian Resource Group in the US found that 3.3% of adults 18 and over were people who never ate meat, fish, seafood or poultry. About one half of the vegetarians were also vegan.⁴⁰ Again, one has to wonder why this number is not significantly higher.

9. Taking the Political Turn for Animals

It is naive, even delusional, for the animal rights movement to believe that this present strategy of a moral crusade will persuade society and its representational governments to recognise legal rights for animals, including enforcement by the state with its legal apparatus.

The animal industrial complex is the formidable adversary of the animal rights movement; however, its position as opponent can be softened and, in certain situations, could be positioned as associate, if the animal rights movement became a social movement with a political agenda. Therefore, I believe the new strategy of the animal rights movement must be to transition from a moral crusade to a social movement – not one or the other but both at the same time. This is the only way to cross the fault line lying between success and failure in understanding the difference between personal and institutional change. This is how to take the political turn for animals. My argument here is

to recognise that much has been achieved for animals but these accomplishments fail to tackle in any meaningful way the institutionalised exploitation of animals.

“The animal advocacy movement has nibbled at the edges of this system of animal exploitation,” Donaldson and Kymlicka write, “but the system itself endures, and indeed expands and deepens all the time, with remarkably little public discussion.⁴¹” I agree with them when they write in *Zoopolis*, that “In a more global perspective, we would argue that the [animal rights] movement has largely failed. The numbers tell the story.”⁴²

The animal rights movement was largely absent from the US presidential election campaign. Between the primaries and Election Day, the movement had ample opportunity to engage with the American people about its treatment of animals at a time when the nation was discussing its values and future. The opportunity to raise society’s treatment of animals during the time of a national debate has once again been lost.

This unsatisfactory situation is further testimony to my assessment that the US animal rights movement is largely in Stage One (public education) with some activity in Stages Two, Three, and Four (public policy, legislation, and enforcement). Once again, the US animal rights movement failed again to seize the opportunity to take the political turn for animals. Meanwhile, the financial and other interests that constitute the animal industrial complex were fully engaged in the presidential election campaign.

When making the case for the Sanders protest, Matt Johnson of DxE said that the group’s aim was to “get the issue on the table, and prevent it from being forgotten or silenced.”⁴³ Indeed, the modern animal rights movement has only recently succeeded in getting the issue of animal rights into the public’s consciousness. We fail to make any meaningful impact in the mainstream political arena. This criticism is not made with any intent to impugn the progress made to date in public policy related to animals. The animal rights movement can rightly make claim to the accomplishments it has achieved in various local

and state (including with citizen initiatives) legislatures and the federal government in the US, and in many other countries throughout the world, and with such international agencies and governments as the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) and the European Union. Nonetheless, animal rights is still principally framed as a personal lifestyle choice — a moral crusade. Animal rights is not a mainstream political issue alongside others such as the economy, defence, and civil rights. For it to become a true social movement, people who are sympathetic toward animals must:

1. Engage with local community meetings and speak out whenever any issue is considered that affects animals. For example, advocates can support Trap-Neuter-Return programs to reduce the population of community cats, or meet with school boards to persuade them to adopt Meatless Mondays and vegetarian/vegan alternatives in school cafeterias.

2. Join political parties and attend local and state meetings to become engaged with issues and candidates. They can discuss animal rights with others in their political party and collaborate with like-minded party members to develop party positions that are informed and sympathetic.

3. Join animal-related state lobbying organizations, which in the US include chapters of the League of Humane Voters and individual groups such as Animal Protection Voters New Mexico. By adding their voices to others in the state who care about animals, advocates can strengthen the call for more effective legislation and oppose any proposal that puts the lives of animals at risk.

4. Quiz candidates for office regarding their positions on animal issues so that they understand how much of the public cares about animals and wants to know where they stand. Encourage candidates to make official statements about supporting animal protection.

5. Attend political conventions to make animal issues more visible. These special events bring together activists, party members, the media and other opinion formers to determine the party's platform and candidates. They are opportunities to raise awareness about animal rights with the objective of seeing

the issue discussed alongside others, especially where interests overlap (e.g., animal protection and the environment, or animal protection and taxation).

6. Stand for public office themselves. When people sympathetic to animals rise to the challenge of representing their community, they can include animal rights among related issues that they will support if elected.

Only when this happens on a sufficient scale, over a protracted period of time, will it be true to say that the US animal rights movement has taken the political turn for animals. Perhaps then, policies will have replaced protests.

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¹ "Animal Rights Activists Disrupt Bernie Sanders at Wisconsin Rally" news release issued by Direct Action Everywhere on March 30, 2016.

² <https://munchies.vice.com/en/articles/why-these-vegans-are-protesting-bernie-sanders-rallies>

³ http://pac.petitions.moveon.org/sign/sen-sanders-end-your?source=none&fb_test=0

⁴ http://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/05/us/politics/hillary-clinton-to-animal-rights-protesters-trumps-have-killed-a-lot-of-animals.html?_r=0

⁵ <http://www.nydailynews.com/entertainment/gossip/donald-trump-sons-fire-hunting-photos-posing-animal-carcasses-african-safari-article-1.1038101>

⁶ https://medium.com/@kitty_jones/open-letter-to-secretary-clinton-on-animal-rights-animal-rights-series-293fe2b9f01a#.6s98I7mk0

⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t8TE2LizOXk>

⁸ www.berniesanders.com

⁹ www.feelthebern.org

¹⁰ <http://feelthebern.org/bernie-sanders-on-animal-welfare/#livestock-issues>

¹¹ <http://www.hslf.org/assets/pdfs/humane-scorecard/humane-scorecard-2014.pdf>

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