

# ANIMAL RIGHTS CAUSE GAINS CREDIBILITY

BY  
AL JOHNSON, PH.D.\*

*The author compares John Stuart Mill's social movement theory to the animal rights movement.*

In the middle of the 19th century, the English philosopher and economist John Stuart Mill observed that every social movement could be characterized by three stages: ridicule, discussion and ultimately, adoption. Within the context of what is commonly referred to as the Animal Rights Movement, I was reminded recently of Mill's observation when I read an article in a Tacoma, Washington newspaper about a man named Ronald Irwin who had acquired an endangered African lowland gorilla when the animal was still an infant. He then proceeded to "raise" the animal virtually in solitary confinement. Now, more than 37 years later, this extraordinary primate has finally been liberated and will live out his remaining days at the San Diego Zoo learning to be a gorilla. But how tragic that this magnificent animal had to spend the best days of his life in a concrete prison for no other reason than the amusement of customers who patronized Mr. Irwin's sporting goods store.

This sad circumstance, and there are countless other such circumstances, serves as a constant reminder to us of what many animal rights advocates have been saying since the inception of their movement: specifically, that human amusement, human vanity and useless laboratory research are poor excuses indeed to continue the widespread abuse of the sentient creatures among us who happen, simply by accident of evolution, to possess neither articulate language nor a well developed capacity to reason.

It now seems more than clear that the mainstream component of the Animal Rights Movement has been successful not only in exposing numerous instances of animal abuse but also in bringing about a national dialogue which follows Mill's tripartite. Setting aside for the moment the issue of "factory farming," which is inherently cruel to animals, and the issue of spending taxpayers' dollars to fund controversial research at the National Institutes of Health and at universi-

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\* Associate Dean, University of Kansas School of Law (this article is reprinted with permission from "Opinions on the Hill," The Lawrence World, Monday, February 1, 1993.)

ties, advocates of animal rights have nevertheless sensitized many of us to some of the more overt instances of animal abuse.

For example, a multi-year international campaign by animal rights advocates designed to publicize the cruelty of the fur industry has resulted in a dramatic decrease in the sale of consumer products made of animal pelts. Part of that campaign included publicizing photographs of mink, fox, sable, coyote, harp seals and many other species dying in steel traps, being beaten to death or being electrocuted on "fur ranches."

Given these grim reminders of what was really behind the glitter of the furrier's showroom, the luster of fur dimmed quickly as thousands of consumers pledged never to buy or wear fur again. Thanks to this campaign of education, fur has now become something of a stigma. A query on the popular game show *Jeopardy* recently stated, "The Humane Society of the United States says you should be ashamed to wear this." The answer? "What is fur?" How right George Bernard Shaw was when he remarked that "custom will reconcile people to any atrocity."

The darker side of the cosmetics and household products industries in the United States and in Europe has also been targeted by animal rights advocates. And, again, the issue was one of educating a largely uninformed public about the plight of animals locked away in research laboratories which were hardly more than torture chambers. While it is certainly true that the U.S. Food and Drug Administration does require efficacy studies on new drugs before they are released for human consumption, federal law imposes significantly less and in some cases no constraints on the cosmetics and household products industries.

And yet for years, millions of animals have been subject to "experiments" that amount to little more than deliberate cruelty just so another brand of lipstick, mascara, floor wax or washing soap could be marketed to the public. These "studies" involved subjecting animals to the eye blistering "Draize Test," the "Lethal Dose 50 Percent Test," where feeding tubes are inserted into the stomachs of, among other animals, dogs, guinea pigs and cats, for the purpose of force feeding the animals oven cleaners, floor polishes and countless other substances to determine the exact dosages necessary to kill at least 50 percent of the sample; inhalation studies; dermal toxicity studies; injection studies; and the list goes on.

The tragedy of these circumstances is that these procedures were not prescribed by law. Moreover, the data gleaned from these "experiments" have proven to be of little practical value in determining how human beings might react to ingesting these substances. But, once again, animal rights advocates, through public education campaigns, have exposed the magnitude of this unnecessary suffering.

These campaigns have been largely responsible for many well-known cosmetics companies, as well as other prominent manufacturers, reducing greatly or eliminating altogether their animal testing

programs. Cosmetics companies, for example, are now saying publicly what they have known privately for some time: that specially developed synthetic materials, Eytex for example, could be used as an effective substitute for live animal tissue as a medium for measuring substance toxicity. Other methodologies, such as epidemiological studies and sophisticated computer modeling, also are available as appropriate substitutes. Few if any of these humane alternatives to animal testing would ever have been adopted were it not for the efforts of animals rights advocates.

Perhaps Mill's description of the evolution of social movements was accurate. Perhaps the Animal Rights Movement has now gone beyond the stage of ridicule and attained an air of credibility where serious dialogue can occur. As a result, humankind may at last be willing to usher in a new ethic, one which recognizes that the wanton mistreatment of defenseless animals is no longer acceptable, that indeed, such treatment insults our sensibilities. These advocates have shown us that education is the key. We must first learn of the atrocities in our midst before we can eradicate them. Despite the protests of the merchants of ignorance, vivisection and vanity, the question from the beginning was never whether animals could reason or speak, but could they suffer. The challenge to the human circumstance, therefore, remains what it has always been; to construct and retain a morality where the preservation of dignity and innocence in all living things is protected. No more and no less.