

## **Fundamentalism or Pragmatism?**

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Rather than address Dr Sztybel's points in order, which would lead to some repetition, I will group his related arguments under the following headings: 'Fundamentalism'; 'Audience psychology'; 'Uncertainty and remoteness'; and 'Miscellaneous points'. Evidence that intrinsic argument works will be followed by my conclusion and some practical suggestions.

### Fundamentalism

"Perhaps what is at work in Perlo's thinking is a variety of animal rights fundamentalist assumptions," as found in "those who reject 'welfarist' legislation partly because it is a departure from animal rights." "We should... not treat sentient beings in a manner that is subordinate to furthering any ideal, including animal rights."

There is indeed a parallel between anti-welfarism and ideology for its own sake. But mine is not a fundamentalist position in either sense. I do not reject "welfarist" reforms or see any contradiction between them and liberation. For example, when I wrote "The case for intrinsic arguments rests not on a concern for ideological purity, but on the need to reach the public," it was not just a pious disclaimer, but expressed my concern that too great a reliance on human-centered supports weakens the great potential of the liberationist case for helping animals, and is thus the very opposite of the pragmatism claimed for those supports.

### Audience psychology

1. Dr Sztybel writes, "...it is not clear if the role of 'reassurance' is only in response to people who wonder about these things and require an answer"; and that one of my statements "seems to confirm that 'reassurances' are only incidental, that is, if people happen to ask."

Reassurance can be given against doubts that are unspoken but anticipated. We can say – at the end of our main argument – "Don't worry, giving up animal products won't affect your health," and give some supporting facts. But there is a significant difference between that and "Another reason for going vegan is that it will make you healthier." The first statement has the subtext "You may be, understandably, wondering about this"; the second: "I've got to offer some additional positive incentive."

2. Regarding my contention that people suspect an ulterior motive when confronted with empirical claims, he objects, "I think the public is smart enough to know that a group promoting animal rights may appeal to other considerations to make things better for animals." Similarly, my criticism of the anti-vivisectionist claim that animals are sufficiently like us to demand ethical treatment, but too unlike us for results to be valid,

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brings the reply: “The fear of some confusion seems itself confused, or to attribute to the interlocutor a lack of critical thinking skills which may be condescending at best, or unkind at worst.”

On the contrary, I think the public is smart enough to be suspicious of statistics and expert pronouncements that seem just too convenient for the promoters of an ethical cause. We ourselves are suspicious when claims point the other way, or even when they are unconnected to our own beliefs. We may wonder, how selective is the information? What have other experts said? Has the survey controlled for all relevant factors? In regard to the “similar-but-different” argument, people with critical thinking skills are likely to ask “What if the difference isn’t great enough to invalidate the research? Would the ethics of similarity then outweigh the benefits of the research? What exactly are these campaigners saying?”

3. “Human rights appeals have a powerful effect by themselves, and are enough to change public policy, quite unlike animal rights appeals *at this stage*” (my emphasis). “...much of [activists’] audience remains speciesist nonetheless, and therefore there is a[n] ... anti-speciesist move to cause these speciesists to create less death and suffering for animals. ... It is not always possible to erase species-prejudices themselves.”

It is certainly not possible to erase species prejudices, or to issue effective animal rights appeals, if we are so convinced that the public is not yet ready for it that we do not even try. Dr Sztybel writes that “[a]ctivists who use extrinsic appeals may consistently denounce speciesism,” but I fear that in fact we do not denounce it often enough, prominently enough, or analytically enough to cause people to re-examine their thinking.

The problem is that our cause is as genuinely different from human liberation struggles – the success of which is often assumed to guarantee the eventual success of our own – as we are different from non-human animal species. When women or Africans were asserted by their oppressors to be less than human, it was a biological mistake that could be corrected. However, nonhuman animals are by definition different, and we must get across the point that their similarity in sentience obliges us to respect them *in all their remaining differentness*. This is a challenge which the movement has, to a significant extent, evaded outside of academic debate.

Even the pro-animal measures that might result in spite of such evasion, by profiting from human-centered arguments, can be limited in scope and implementation because that same humanist ethos confers low priority on the measures. As Arluke writes, [c]rossing the boundaries between humans and animals is taboo in Western societies. ... Those who are particularly anxious over such boundary blurring are likely to diminish the significance of cruelty, arguing that if taken too seriously, let alone on a level with violent crimes against people, it will degrade what it means to be human. (Arluke 2006: 194)

He is referring to acts that are already recognized as cruelty, legally prohibited, and comparatively rare; how much more so the legal, widespread forms of animal abuse.

### Uncertainty and Remoteness

With regard to uncertainty and remoteness, Dr. Szybel writes: “It *is* certain that meat-eating is unhealthy and an environmental disaster, and that vivisection is largely unhelpful in predicting results for humans, even if some so-called ‘experts’ are still .. too grudging to admit it,”; and “intrinsic appeals may also involve concerning oneself with animals whom one never sees.”

People’s uncertainty about meat-eating and health lies in such questions as how unhealthy it is, and how much and what kinds of meat can be tolerated by each individual. The person inclined to respond to the health argument might say, “I eat a little chicken and that’s not going to kill me,” which is very likely true. But the thought: “Murdering the occasional chicken is not so terrible” would be less comfortable, since the death of the chicken is certain and the self-exoneration is weak. Another source of uncertainty is that many people are suspicious of what may be seen as ever-changing health scares. Vegetarians who are unconcerned about animals may be tempted to start eating meat again if their health remains as good as it was, but no better, and they start to wonder whether their self-imposed “deprivation” is really necessary.

Environmental disaster has been officially linked to meat and dairy production, but how convinced in their hearts are people that *any* relevant “green” action by the individual is going to matter?

The scientific anti-vivisection case may seem certain to us, but the fact that the government and the research establishment reject it carries great weight with the public. The species-difference argument also avoids the question of vivisection for veterinary research; and the whole scientific case suffers from the exaggerated, frequently-made claim that animal research has never done any good. But in all these instances there is no doubt and no need for debate about the fact that the animals concerned have suffered and died.

As for remoteness, the part of the dead animal on one’s plate is more immediate as an intrinsic argument than any statistics about cancer or land usage, even though one has never seen the animal alive. Video evidence of laboratory animal suffering is more immediate than figures about adverse drug reactions – which are not necessarily all the result of animal testing.

### Miscellaneous Points

(1) “... if extrinsic appeals result in *less killing of animals and also less animal suffering*, then, in fact, intrinsic concerns of animal rightists may *partly* be won by extrinsic appeals” (his emphases). Regarding my appeal to “stick to the subject,” he writes, “helping animals *is* part of the subject” (and that can be furthered by partly extrinsic argument).

Both these statements equivocate between intrinsic *argument* and intrinsic *concerns*. An extrinsic argument that serves an intrinsic concern is still an extrinsic argument.

(2) Commenting on my remarks that the animals don't care about human-centered concerns, he writes "Many animals may not care about PETA's slogans, either ... and animals do care about suffering less and being allowed to live which extrinsic appeals may help...."

Saying that animals don't care about human-centered concerns is a way of saying that their interests are more important to them than human interests, so that if they could understand the issues they would not care about the non-animal concerns, but they would care about PETA's slogans.

(3) Quoting me that "To hurt or kill animals is wrong, regardless of any other considerations," Dr Szybel asks: "Is it wrong to kill a bear in self-defense or to cause unavoidable suffering to animals at the veterinarians?" Of course it is not. My statement was in the context of debate with supporters of animal abuse, the "other considerations" referred to being such things as medical progress, the "right to choose" what we eat or wear, the entertainment value of zoos, etc. In an academic discussion, or if asked while campaigning, I would explicitly exempt self-defense or therapeutic animal suffering.

#### Evidence that Intrinsic Argument Works

In the course of denouncing vivisection on scientific grounds, neurologist Marius Maxwell (2006) mentioned, citing the December 13<sup>th</sup> 2006 issue of *Nature*, that in December 2005 Swiss animal law was reformed "to protect the 'dignity of creation' of animals" – an intrinsic principle that "rightly has had the effect of progressive denial of funding for non-human primate research."

The campaign to close Hill Grove cat farm, which bred cats for vivisection, began in 1981 and finally resulted in the establishment's closure in 1999. In 1997 its most active campaigner, Cynthia O'Neill, "handed over the running of the growing campaign to Heather James and Greg Jennings"; a noteworthy feature of the handover was that "[while] the original campaigners had placed the emphasis on the fact that *vivisection is scientific fraud*, the new leadership focused on the cruelty to the cats ..." (The Campaigners 2002: 80)

In a dramatic victory, "Dozens of monkeys destined for experiments in South America arrive[d] in an English sanctuary ... after a successful International Animal Rights Day protest to close the laboratory in which they were imprisoned." (Uncaged 2008; details can be found at <<http://www.uncaged.co.uk/news/2008.chile.htm>>) For the IARD project, see below under "Conclusion and practical suggestions."

The Jamie Oliver/Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall TV campaign "to expose the short and brutal lives of broiler birds," was a straightforward appeal to compassion, with the result

that, despite initial industry claims of its ineffectiveness. For example, the Consumer Affairs Correspondent for the Independent newspaper Martin Hickman (2008) wrote:

“Sales of free-range poultry shot up by 35 per cent last month compared with January 2007, while sales of standard indoor birds fell by 7 per cent, according to a survey of 25,000 shoppers by the market research company TNS.

Supermarkets have been stripped of free-range birds ...

The rise in sales would have been even higher if poultry producers had been able to keep up with demand. Many suppliers in the £2bn-a-year poultry industry are now expected to convert cramped chicken sheds into more spacious accommodation.”

Better yet, “Overall, chicken sales were down by 4.8 per cent, perhaps because many people, when faced with an absence of free-range chicken, simply bought no chicken.”

During Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall’s “Chicken Run shows, residents of the Devon town of Axminster were invited to see free-range and intensive systems running alongside each other in a shed; many left in tears. According to separate polling by ACNielsen, half of the four million viewers who saw the shows said they would buy better chicken.” (Hickman 2008)

Although the celebrity of the two campaigners undoubtedly played a part in the campaign’s success, their fame was relevant to their subject. And it appears that the public responded more to the suffering of the chickens than to the presenters’ status.

Dr. Szybel observes that most veggies are so for health reasons. But what is the percentage of veggies? According to a 2003 survey in the US., “From 4-10 percent call themselves vegetarians,” of whom “over half ... can be classified as vegans,” allowing for margin of error. (Anon., *Vegetarian Journal* 2003) In the U.K. a 2006 figure is “5-6 per cent ... and the number is rising. The number of vegans has increased ten fold in the last 10 years.” (Anon., *Arkangel* 2007). How much faster might it rise in response to greater emphasis on morality?

### Conclusion and Practical Suggestions

“It is ethically virtuous,” Dr Szybel argues, “to be concerned with promoting human health, a sound environment, and efficacious medical research as well as the just treatment of animals. ... Should ethical people not care about these things? We should not care about them to

the exclusion of animal rights, but that is obviously not what I am suggesting.”

There are many concerns and problems that ethical people care about, but they must choose where to place their resources and their emphasis. The oppression of animals is the greatest evil on earth, in scope, intensity, duration, universality, religious and ideological support, the helplessness of its victims, and its neglect by politicians. Even people in the movement sometimes fail to recognize this, so accustomed are we to thinking of ourselves as “just another cause,” and an unpopular, necessarily defensive one at that. In fact, ours is the most urgent cause. It is ethically virtuous to show why animal exploitation is evil, and would be evil even if it had no adverse human-centered side-effects. When we add those side-effects to our argument we are suggesting – at the very least, muddying the waters by raising the possibility – that animal exploitation might be acceptable if it benefited humans or the environment.

Our attempts, by such means, to ingratiate ourselves with the mainstream have not won us a place on the liberal agenda. Anti-war arguments don’t mention the death or lethal neglect of animals in war, let alone any connection of war with meat-eating; Michael Moore has vehemently denounced the animal rights movement (Anon., *Animal Times* 2007: 10); anti-poverty campaigners suggest that people donate a goat or a cow to poor villages; Al Gore has yet to succumb to PETA’s colorful exhortations to add vegetarianism to his anti-global-warming recommendations (Anon., *Animal Times* 2008: 28-29); the American Civil Liberties Union had only the mildest reservations about the Animal Enterprise Terrorism Act which it otherwise condones (Best 2007).

There is nothing unethical or dogmatic about trying to correct this imbalance by minimizing or even sometimes excluding extrinsic factors from our arguments. Nor need the effort be confined to philosophy seminars. Information stalls on any animal issue, however “welfarist” the immediate subject, can include, alongside facts about the treatment of the animals, leaflets explaining the liberationist point of view and refuting the damning, often unspoken, objection that the animals just aren’t important enough to bother about. Placards can convey the compassion-plus-rights case in a few words. These two elements should be introduced whenever there is a chance to speak at public meetings, on the radio, in conversation, or in letters to the government. We should never back down and say “Of course humans are more important, but ...”; instead we should say, for example, “Animals are just as important; what are your grounds for believing otherwise?”

Every year the organization Uncaged ([www.uncaged.co.uk](http://www.uncaged.co.uk)) promotes an International Animal Rights Day, observed worldwide. The purpose is to secure by 2048 a Universal Declaration of Animal Rights 100 years after the equivalent human rights declaration. Demonstrators choose a site outside a place of animal abuse, linking the theory with particular aims, and the IARD leaflet reviews all the forms of animal oppression. In cities with enough support for a big parade in the center, it will stop on the way when passing abusive shops, or select a particular type of abuse as its theme.

Despite the event's linkage of animal rights with human rights, the centrality it gives to the animal rights case has undoubtedly made many people think twice. All campaigners could add public events of this type to their usual work on specific issues.

In making these suggestions my goal is the same as Dr Szybel's: to end, as soon as possible, the human-inflicted suffering and untimely death of animals. My fundamentalism, if it can be so defined, is entirely pragmatic.

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