



The Philosophy behind the Movement: Animal Studies versus Animal Rights

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Abstract

Recently, many pro-animal thinkers have expressed critical views on the animal rights movement. In particular, the movement has been criticized for being philosophically uninformed, politically regressive, and practically unpersuasive. This paper investigates these criticisms and seeks to map out the philosophy behind the grassroots animal rights movement, specifically. It concludes that the criticism presented by animal studies scholars is often misplaced due to a lack of understanding of the philosophical notions within the movement, but that the critics are right to argue that the movement needs to place more emphasis on persuasion.

Keywords

activism, animal ethics, animal rights, animal rights movement, animal studies

Introduction

Nonhuman animals have slowly emerged as a valid topic of research within the humanities. At the same time, the animal rights movement has gained both popularity and notoriety. However, the relationship between the movement and academic study is undecided, and some recent animal studies researchers have expressed criticism toward the movement. The movement has been accused of being politically unaware, of following misleading philosophies, and of being practically unpersuasive or even harmful.

This paper investigates the validity of this criticism and seeks, as a response, to sketch the philosophy behind the movement. The article will examine in particular the criticisms presented by Matthew Calarco and Lee Hall, focusing on grassroots activists, who are defined by their belief in legal and/or illegal direct action. For the purposes of this paper, a small survey was carried out among UK grassroots activists. This survey consisted of six broad questions related to animal rights (such as “How relevant, as an activist, is theory for you?”) and led to 21 responses. The survey was first conducted via an e-mail

list in the spring of 2009. Activists were informed that they could, if they wished, remain anonymous, and most chose to do so. The author then proceeded to ask advocates with a long background in activism, whom she knew would otherwise be unlikely to respond to questionnaires, to complete the survey. Responses were compared, with regard to the key issues presented in this paper, and the most commonplace views were highlighted.

Anthropocentrism and Animal Rights

One of the critics of the animal rights movement is Matthew Calarco. A vehement antispeciesist and a brilliant commentator, Calarco has written extensively on why and how society ought to review its cultural, political, and moral understanding of nonhuman animals. Regardless of his strong stance, however, Calarco is skeptical when it comes to what he terms “animal rights politics” (Calarco, 2008, p. 8).

First, Calarco states that “[m]uch of the contemporary animal rights discourse and politics is in fact another form of identity politics... But this approach to animal ethics and politics is fraught with considerable theoretical and ethical difficulties” (Calarco, 2008, p. 7). His claim is that animal rights politics is fixated on essentialist subjectivity and identity, and—as the anthropocentric tradition has been particularly eager to centralize essentialist notions of identity and subjectivity—is thus ultimately anthropocentric. Calarco maintains that a prime example of this misleading approach is Regan’s emphasis on the notion of “subject-of-a-life,” which promotes rights of subjects without recognizing that humanity is the prototype of subjectivity, and that what is ultimately achieved is therefore the restatement of hierarchies and the special status of human beings.

Second, Calarco argues that “[m]uch of animal rights labors under the tacit (and contentious) assumption that the fundamental channels of change regarding animals are to be found in existing legal and political institutions” (Calarco, 2008, p. 7). Since the institutions within which animal rights politics function are anthropocentric, animal rights politics itself risks reproducing anthropocentrism. This criticism refers not only to the metaphysical ramifications of animal rights politics, but also to concrete societal and political structures. For instance, it is often argued that, as a substantial source of financial gain, animal industries dictate the very legal and political systems that should regulate them.¹

Third, Calarco asserts that, in order to be heard, animal rights activists have sought to construct a distinct form of identity politics that would be different and even superior in relation to other identity struggles. This has led to a

situation where “[a]nimal rights activists themselves have often adopted the attitude that animal rights issues trump all other political concerns, and in the process have engaged in a number of rather questionable and sometimes politically regressive and conservative strategies in the name of promoting animal rights” (Calarco, 2008, p. 8). Calarco may here be referring to campaigns by PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals), which have made extensive use of the seminaked, sexualized female body. A widely repeated argument is that this furthers sexist attitudes and thus goes against the struggle for gender equality. Therefore, the risk is that animal rights politics are used in ways that conflict with other political causes.

Are the charges justified? The notion “subject” (or Regan’s “subject-of-a-life”) does not have to remain anthropocentric. Arguably, it is not conformist but radical to insist that animals are individuals and subjects, for the reclamation of the term fundamentally challenges the anthropocentric world order. What was previously an exclusive worldview becomes inclusive, and the hierarchy so utterly relevant for the last 2000 years of Western philosophy is collapsed in one move by declaring that animals, indeed, are our equals. The crucial factor here is that reclamation alters a concept and thus challenges its moral and political connotations. Calarco’s criticism assumes that the term *subject* remains static (and thus animals are merely brought under its jurisdiction), whereas in fact it by necessity undergoes a dramatic change (and thus humans are dethroned as the icons of value). Therefore, talk of “animal subjects” may explicitly and directly question the special value of humans, replace hierarchies with equality, and pose a metaphysical challenge to anthropocentrism.

In order to investigate the remaining two points of criticism, it is important to draw a distinction between different types of animal rights advocacy. Large, mainstream organizations (such as PETA), which walk the fine line between welfarism and animal rights, tend to operate within the dominant political, legal, and economic systems. Grassroots activists, on the other hand, believe in legal and/or illegal direct action, rather than political lobbying. With regard to grassroots activists, Calarco’s criticism seems unfair, for they tend to remain critical of the political, legal, and economic structures within which larger organizations operate (anarchism is a rather common political stance). Moreover, they tend to show solidarity with other forms of identity politics, such as the fight against sexism and racism; thus, PETA’s use of sexist images has caused great upheaval and irritation within the grassroots movement. Therefore, although the criticism may be relevant in relation to mainstream organizations, it seems inapt when leveled at grassroots activism.

Let us have a look at the types of responses gathered during the survey. First, there was an emphasis on individuality (which seemingly amounts to the type

of subjectivism Calarco discusses). However, many respondents highlighted the radicalism of this emphasis. One stated: "I think animals are individuals. This is hard for the society to accept, because for so long they have been meat." Whereas for critics, individuality has roots in anthropocentrism, for this activist, meat is a product of anthropocentrism, and individuality the antonym of meat. A further indication of this is the stark criticism of interanimal hierarchies. Many of the respondents were vehemently against giving a special status to certain animals (such as primates or dogs) at the expense of others, or demanding humanlike qualities of animals. One argued that "[t]hey all have different capacities and needs, but it's arrogant to assign them different moral rights... They don't have to look cute or behave like humans to be treated with respect." This indicates that the grassroots movement includes an inclination to define "individuality" or "subjectivity" in relatively radical terms, as it explicitly attacks the demand for similarity and hierarchies.

Second, many of the respondents felt that the current legal and political contexts were too restrictive, since working only from within these contexts would lead to conservative results or even further the use of animals (an example being the RSPCA "Freedom food" label used to promote the consumption of meat). One respondent argued, "If you act so as to please the current political climate, you have to moderate your behaviour to a point where you are no longer working for animal liberation." This is perhaps the most distinctive feature of grassroots activism: it tends to distance itself vocally from the political context of animal use. This renders grassroots activism significantly more radical than the criticism acknowledges.

Third, almost all the respondents argued for animal rights politics that would be attentive toward other political struggles. One stated that "[a]nimal rights for me include human rights... so they are all equal," and another maintained that veganism consists of "no animal oppression or human oppression." This is supported by animal rights literature. For instance, the Animal Liberation Front website claims that "[h]elping animals is not more or less important than helping human beings—both are important. Animal suffering and human suffering are interconnected" (Animal Liberation Front, 2009a). Again, it can be argued that this is an integral part of grassroots activism and that the accusation of political regression, when it comes to the majority of grassroots activism, is unjustified.

The one difference between intrahuman and animal rights issues that was highlighted in the survey was the inability of animals to have a political voice, and the ensuing responsibility of activists to speak for them: "The AR movement is the only movement in history where the entire movement is made up of people protecting rights of *other* individuals"; "[s]laves had voices, women

had voices, animals have no voice we can understand. So the struggle is very different.” This other-directedness lends the movement its particularity and requires more reflection.

Therefore, although Calarco does have relevant criticism to offer in the context of the mainstream animal rights movement, the criticism is ill-suited to the grassroots animal rights movement. There is another critic, however, who has attacked the grassroots animal rights movement itself, with much more venom than Calarco displays in his sophisticated philosophical reflections.

Inconsistency and Animal Rights

Lee Hall is another critic with a pro-animal background—in fact, she is a vehement supporter of animal rights. Whereas Calarco’s criticism is directed against “animal rights politics” in general, the target of Lee’s criticism is what she calls “militant” animal rights activists. She does not define this term adequately, but her description would seem to cover many, if not most, UK grassroots activists—for instance, she considers the liberation of individual animals and fur-related demonstrations to be signs of militancy. Hall’s main charge is that militant activists are guilty of various inconsistencies.

First of all, Hall argues that militant activists use methods that will alienate rather than persuade people. Hall is especially critical of groups like SHAC (Stop Huntington Animal Cruelty—a group seeking to bankrupt the commercial animal toxicology laboratory Huntington Life Sciences) because of their apparent disregard of the public. Although SHAC’s goal is not to effect a change in the anthropocentric culture, but rather to abolish one single company via the use of force, Hall argues that the negative media coverage given to such activists will persuade the public to become hostile toward animal rights: “When faced with actions that seek to threaten rather than persuade, people quite naturally react, rather than respond, to them” (Hall, 2006, p. 75). Since animal use will not be abolished until the public takes a stance against it, Hall believes SHAC is having a negative, rather than a positive, impact.

Second, Hall argues that militant activists end up causing themselves damage by giving the industry-protecting politicians exactly what they want: acts that will justify criminalization. Illegal direct action, in particular, will yield negative media attention, which again will enable authorities to put in place draconian rules regarding animal advocacy. These draconian rules are already in evidence, as countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom have established laws that protect the industries from activism and enable the

police to treat nonviolent activists as “organized crime” or “terrorists.”² Lee’s worry is that this will have far-reaching consequences even for those activists who are not militants, as the laws do not “clearly distinguish between serious threats and expressive advocacy that’s been at the core of constitutional political-speech protections” (Hall, 2006, p. 49).

Third, Hall suggests that “militant” activists are at times working under the welfarist agenda, emphasizing animal cruelty and the rescue of individual animals rather than promoting animal dignity in more general terms. For instance, SHAC has brought forward footage that shows dogs in laboratories being horrifically abused, and this, in Hall’s opinion, implies that the campaign is built on concern over cruelty rather than animal rights. Hall even argues that the Animal Liberation Front (ALF) does not problematize the use of animals, only the “abuse” of them. She bases this claim on the fact that the welfare of liberated animals in places like farm animal sanctuaries is celebrated, and thus, the emphasis is not on the freedom of animals from domestication (Hall, 2006, p. 71).

Fourth, Lee argues that the “militant” movement does not follow what it preaches. It is based on an ethic according to which force over others ought to be prevented, and within which utilitarian calculations never come before the value of individual beings. In practice, however, the movement uses force in order to gain a specific end. The metaphor of war is evident in the writings of some militant thinkers, such as Steve Best, and according to Hall this creates a black-and-white understanding of reality, which falsely depicts other human beings as the enemy. Hall maintains that “[w]e are not warriors . . . Other people are not the enemy of animal rights; if there is an enemy at all, it is the tendency to depersonalise others” (Hall, 2006, pp. 40-41).³ Therefore, she suggests that it is hate and depersonalization, both in her opinion present within the movement, that ultimately also prepare the way for animal abuse.

It is important to point out that Hall has been criticized (in particular by activists involved in the campaigns she discusses) for making numerous factual errors and for relying on highly misrepresentative and often explicitly biased media accounts. UK activist Lynn Sawyer states in her response to Hall that: “Much of her argument is based upon state propaganda [about] incidents which are supposed to have happened in the UK. She misleads not only by what she says, but also by omission” (Miller, 2009). It can be argued that Hall is also guilty of adding to the media hysteria by painting a highly sinister image of the grassroots campaigner. Hall makes numerous seemingly bizarre correlations between animal rights activists and right-wing fanatics (fascist, pro-life, or both), and at times bullish sociological characterizations.⁴ Activists will struggle with Lee’s claims, as people with strong right-wing views are usually expelled from grassroots groups, and the grassroots movement tends to be

very heterogeneous when it comes to social identity. Hall therefore loses some credibility in her willingness to rely on, and further promote, unfounded caricatures.

But what about the actual content of Hall's argument? Let us start with the third and fourth arguments, which are the most problematic. The argument concerning welfarism is poorly supported. The suggestion that the Animal Liberation Front does not question animal use in general is factually—and rather obviously—wrong. ALF's mission statement asserts that the aim is “[t]o abolish institutionalized animal exploitation because it assumes that animals are property” (Animal Liberation Front, 2009b). The activists interviewed agree. One posits that “[t]he point is to stop all exploitation,” and another says, “Animals need to be left be—the exploitation needs to end.” Hall is right to suggest that mediations aimed at the general public include an emphasis on suffering and abuse, but the term *mediation* ought to be underlined here. It is a tool of persuasion, a way of gaining the type of “response” Hall herself is arguing for, as images of suffering can be a very effective tool in provoking critical thinking. In a society that centralizes the normative meaning of suffering, images of suffering invoke normative reflection. Hall is correct in her statement that abuse is not the only issue, but she is inaccurate in her claim that grassroots activism centralizes abuse alone, or that imagery related to suffering is, *per se*, irrelevant or welfarist.

Moreover, we need to question whether emphasis on individual animals is necessarily welfarist. Hall's central suggestion is that one ought to concentrate on the industries rather than particular animals; however, one could claim that sidelining the living, breathing, individual animals leads to an abstraction. Animal rights become purely a matter of ideas (“autonomy,” “justice,” “rights,” etc.) and generalities (the faceless, generic “animal”), rather than a way of thinking that incorporates normative agendas into the context of the living animal: “This animal.”

In fact, it can be argued that generic understandings of nonhuman animals have enabled anthropocentric systems of animal use, as they detach or deflect us from normative responses toward specific, living creatures. As Hannah Arendt famously argued, totalitarianism is partly enabled by lack of specificity (Arendt, 2004). Here, individual creatures are approached as herds or masses, which allows one to subject them to abstract decision making that bypasses their own needs and interests. Another historical source is Levinas, who maintained that it is the “face” of the “Other”—the specificity of a given being right in front of us—that reminds us of the principle that is so important: “You shall not commit murder” (Levinas, 1999, p. 199). Following him, it may be precisely the concrete, living animal who is the epitome of persuasion, a force

of obligation that “convinces even ‘the people who do not wish to listen’” (Levinas, 1999, p. 210). We can also follow Derrida, who criticizes generic notions and states that “That animal” is the source of responsibility. It is the concrete animal in front of us who introduces us to animal singularity and opens the door for eradication of anthropocentrism (Derrida, 2004).

Therefore, it would seem that Hall is forgetting about the importance of particularity. Although we must not ignore the systems that subjugate animal lives, nor the unfathomable number of animals who are made the objects of pain and death every year, an understanding of the Other is based on her singularity. This emphasis on particularity is evident in many of the responses in the survey. One respondent states: “You can’t turn away from an animal. It’s as simple as that. Each one counts,” while another comments, “Species don’t make you care, but seeing these beautiful creatures in real life will and then you realise that hey, there might be something to [animal rights],” and a third one maintains, “How could I turn away from them [individual dogs and rats] and still think that I believe in their value? What would that mean?”

What about Hall’s fourth claim, according to which grassroots or “militant” activists repeat oppressive politics? Hall is right to argue that an animal rights movement based on the use of force defeats its purpose. It is important, however, to make a distinction between foundational beliefs and practical methods. As a practical method, use of force does not necessarily defeat a foundational belief that use of force should be avoided. A paradoxical but perhaps unavoidable principle is that, in certain contexts (in particular, those concerning self-defense and the defense of innocents), use of force as a method is necessary in order to adhere to a foundational belief that use of force is something to be avoided.

This sentiment was also apparent in many of the survey responses, where a concurrent theme was the belief that the refusal to use force in order to assist animals can (in given contexts) reflect anthropocentric attitudes. First, a common claim was that if one believes in force when assisting humans (for instance, helping the victim of a hate crime), it is speciesist to think otherwise in the context of nonhuman animals: “If I was being attacked and there were people witnessing it, I would expect and want them to help me! Because I am non-speciesist, this applies equally to humans and nonhumans who I witness being attacked.” Second, it was suggested that avoidance of force in relation to particular types of animals may repeat anthropocentric notions as to what type of animal deserves merit:

If someone breaks into a yard to rescue a badly abused dog, most people would say that’s acceptable even though someone broke the law by breaking in. People may feel

differently if someone broke in to rescue a badly abused cow, because they are boxed off as “food” rather than “pet” and therefore treated completely differently.⁵

It has to be noted that, following Hall, “violence” and “force” are understood here in a very broad sense, including animal liberation and holding a banner behind a fur-wearing model. It also has to be carefully emphasized that this is not to say that it is strategically wise or morally acceptable to use whatever force one sees fit in the name of animal rights. This is another issue entirely and merits critical attention; the argument here is simply that the issue of force is much more nuanced than Hall suggests.

Hall’s first and second arguments deserve further consideration. First, the issue of public support has been largely overlooked by grassroots activists. The grassroots movement has displayed an explicit disregard of public opinion, particularly in the form of the belief that the media is always biased and thus not relevant. One of the responding activists states that:

[w]hatever activists do, the media spin it to suit the capitalist agenda, the agenda that wants us to sit down and shut up. So if we all did peaceful activities till the cows came home, nothing would change, the general public would carry on as normal, and billions of animals would continue to suffer. Plus, then the media would depict activists as a bunch of no-hoping tofu wielders! We can’t win the media war in the age of meat when we’re fighting against some of the most profitable industries in the world. Industries that the media profit from through advertising.

This view is correct in reminding us that the media is affected by industry and by politics, and that, partly because of this, gaining positive animal rights coverage is extremely difficult.⁶ The view is simplistic, however, in that it depicts the media, industries, and politics in an overly unified manner that assigns them single, background intentionality. These enterprises are heavily interlinked, but there is no single political agency that continuously supervises every single news item placed in the media. The media are biased but not impenetrable.

The most valuable point that Hall brings forward is the argument that in order to establish long-term change, public opinion needs to be altered. This is the challenge of the animal rights movement: to effect persuasion, more explicitly and more reflectively. It is the element that should be a constant reference point when deciding on tactics. Grassroots activists have perhaps too easily ignored one fundamental truth: human beings need to alter their consumer habits drastically, and in order to effect such a change, persuasion is necessary. Change will not happen by force, but by leading people to question their anthropocentric attitudes. New and more effective forms of persuasion

need to be discovered. Moreover, Hall's emphasis on "not shooting oneself in the foot" is important. Communicating values needs to take place in the context of political awareness of not only who is at fault, but also how society will respond. Governments serve industry interests, and this will make it that much harder for activists to achieve their aims—unless, of course, they have the support of the critical mass.

Philosophy of the Obvious

The paper has thus far concentrated on criticism, ruling out what the grassroots animal rights movement is not like. But what are the positives? What is the philosophy behind the movement?

Here the thoughts of Cora Diamond may be helpful. In her essay on *The Lives of Animals*, by J. M. Coetzee, Diamond introduces Stanley Cavell's concept of the "difficulty of reality." The main character, Elizabeth Costello, is in the grips of this difficulty, as she has become "exposed" (Diamond, 2008, p. 71) to the horror of animal agriculture and turned into an open "wound" (Diamond, 2008, p. 47). Costello cannot fathom the society she lives in, and at the height of exposure, she reflects, with growing anxiety:

It is as if I were to visit friends, and to make some polite remark about the lamp in their living room, and they were to say, 'Yes, it's nice, isn't it? Polish-Jewish skin it's made of, we find that's the best, the skins of young Polish-Jewish virgins.' (Coetzee, 1999, p. 69)

Diamond goes on to argue that it is problematic to treat the fate of animals as a point of normative debate, as it would be problematic to meet the arguments of Holocaust deniers as a source of serious moral debate. She asks, "But what kind of beings are we for whom this is an 'issue'?" (Diamond, 2008, p. 51). Diamond is especially wary of "deflection," which refers to escape into theory from the difficulty of reality and argues that animal rights theory (particularly the "Singer-Regan approach") is guilty of it. Diamond follows Cavell's reading of Wittgenstein, according to which philosophy exists to show the obvious. Perhaps in relation to animals, too, we ought to not concentrate on arguments but on the obvious. Here, exposure and persuasion become crucial. We should not deflect to moral theory, but should rather become, like Elizabeth Costello, exposed to what is right in front of us, and persuade others to become similarly exposed. In both exposure and persuasion, "fellow-feelings" act as a way of approaching nonhuman animals and ethics: "Loving attention to another being . . . is essential to any understanding of the evil of injustice" (Diamond, 2001, p. 131).

There are some problems with Diamond's argument. In particular, it is questionable whether theory is always deflection. On the contrary, it may act as a catalyst of exposure and make us see the being that is usually ignored or made sense of as meaningless biology. Thus, metaphysically rigid or not, animal rights theory can function as one type of persuasion (the most obvious example being the astonishing popularity of Peter Singer's *Animal Liberation*). However, there is much truth in the claim that other, perhaps more fruitful, means of persuasion are long overdue. What is of interest here is the manner in which the animal rights movement may itself produce an alternative to theory. Intriguingly, this alternative echoes Diamond's framework.

At the center of grassroots activism, there is an acute sense of *awareness* of the animal that can be translated as "exposure." Many of the respondents referred to personal experiences of animals that had taken the form of an exposure or (to refer to Derrida and Levinas) "interruption." One says of an animal she had come across on the street: "She was just so delicate and so attentive I will never forget her. My encounter with her changed everything and made me even more passionate about all living beings. There and then, I just saw things differently." Others refer to sudden instances of becoming aware of the eyes or faces of animals, and acknowledging immediately that an animal is "a somebody." This tends to lead to a more thorough awareness of their condition, and to more hounding exposure. Throughout the activists' responses, there is a sense of overwhelming and tangible awareness of the manner in which animals are treated. One respondent writes: "I can't forget what happens to animals. It's everywhere I go, I carry it with me," and another states, "It haunts me at night, it turns my stomach, and I sometimes can't bear it because it's all too much." It would seem that for many activists, the animal has stopped being a distant figure that is externalized via deflection, but rather has become a part of their mindscape. The animal leaves an acute mark or a trace in the activist, and the effect is not only wounding, but to many, also crippling.

Therefore, grassroots activism finds one impetus in exposure. Although activism is often linked to Singer's utilitarianism and argued to be overly theory-based, it would seem that it is, in fact, partly grounded on awareness of a type that is quite the opposite of cold rationality. This lays the basis for an identity that is not—as Hall would suggest—self-centered, totalitarian, or heroic, but rather marked by a sense of acute disability. The activist is not a cold, calculative agent, but rather somebody exposed to animality, who cannot but help follow his or her fellow-feeling. This disability offers a new way of looking at the criticisms offered by Calarco and Hall: Calarco criticizes the animal rights movement for falling foul of rationalizing subjectivity, and Hall asks it to be more rational, but perhaps both miss the core of what it means for

an activist to be touched by animality. There is no perfect, self-serving agency here, but rather exposure and wounded beings.

As I hinted earlier, the notion of the difficulty of reality also finds home within the grassroots animal rights movement. First, for many activists the treatment of nonhuman animals exceeds the limits of language. A typical response to the plight of animals is that: "There are no words to describe it." Language cannot do justice to the pig incarcerated in a cage barely her own size or the wounded hen unable to move or spread her wings. Second, various startling conflicts and contradictions within mainstream animal imagery cause bewilderment that resists words. Many activists express utter frustration of living in a society, apparently occupied by decent people, that ultimately lives off death and oppression. One respondent states, "It's a constant headache. Like, at my university, I know that animals are suffering from cancer, broken limbs, and God knows what all the time, but students just walk around eating their lunch like nothing was happening." Third, human motivations cause confusion that cannot be put in order via language. A respondent writes: "Humans are a puzzle!" and another states: "I don't understand it. People know better but turn the blind eye, and I can't work it out." Arguably, the incapacity to make sense of the actions of society is widespread within the movement,⁷ and the movement has, to a certain extent, distanced itself from a dialogue with the society. Perhaps the reality of the grassroots activist is not only difficult, but utterly frustrating, bewildering, and nearing on impossible.

This leads to the final point. It seems that many within the grassroots movement are critical of theory. In the responses, few referred to philosophical works as their main inspiration. A common animal rights metaphor talks of a burning building full of animals, which is witnessed by an activist and a theorist. The theorist discusses the moral status of animals and embarks on metaphysical pondering, while the activist runs in and saves the animals. This sentiment is epitomized in the rather popular slogan: "You are a terrorist? Thank God. I thought you said you were a theorist!" Thus, there is a sense of elemental practicality to grassroots activism, which adds to the uniqueness of its philosophical ramifications. Here, feelings of fellowship also become relevant. Although many of the respondents underlined reason as the main motivation for their beliefs, many also emphasized emotions and particularly a sense of kinship. One respondent writes: "I don't believe that animals are lower or completely different from us. I see myself in them, and them in myself."

Therefore, in an interesting manner, grassroots animal rights activism may be the type of "philosophy of the obvious" that Diamond discusses. It is based on exposure, a sense of the difficulty of reality, avoidance of deflection, and kinship. It is obvious that what is happening to animals should not be

happening, and the activist follows this blatancy. This further emphasizes the radicality of the movement and its distance from reformist politics. More important, it opens new directions in understanding a topic much neglected thus far: activist philosophy.

Conclusion

Animal rights politics, and in particular grassroots animal activism, have come under a certain amount of criticism. There is a definite place for this criticism, for the grassroots movement has shown failings, particularly in ignoring the role of persuasion. However, much of the criticism is misplaced. Grassroots activism is not as reformist, unfruitful, or contradictory as some critics have proposed, and the philosophical implications behind activism open new, interesting, and also radical ways of understanding the activist.

It can be argued that normative commitment demands that we all act for the nonhuman animals who are dying in the tens of billions each year in order to support frivolous habits and dietary preferences. Looking at the activist may help sketch ways in which each of us can speak on behalf of, and relate in new ways toward, our nonhuman others.

Notes

1. Notoriously enough, welfare legislation tends to be minimal, and politicians serve to protect rather than criticize the animal industries. See Rogers and Kaplan, 2004.

2. Prison sentences for relatively minor, and in some cases perfectly legal, activities can be extreme. For instance, in the 2008 Sequani trial, activist Sean Kirtley was sentenced to four years of imprisonment for maintaining a legal website: <http://netcu.wordpress.com/> (accessed June 16, 2009).

3. In perhaps an even more vehement tone than Hall uses, Steve Best maintains that Hall (and other critics of militant action, such as Gary Francione) have become “puppets for the corporate-state complex.” He labels Hall “the consummate smug bourgeois liberal” who does not understand that “[t]ime has grown too short to move at the snail’s pace afforded by peaceful resistance.” Best goes on: “In spite of their cookbooks, recipes and vegan dining alternatives, in four years there will be a hell of a lot more meat eaters than vegans and the planet will be irreversibly damaged.” Best also argues that “[f]ew if any movements for social change have succeeded without a radical fringe, without civil disobedience, property destruction, and even violence—so why should one expect it to be any different with the animal liberation struggle?” (Best, 2009).

4. For instance, she claims that militant activists suffer from the “perennial frustration and powerlessness of youth” and have attention spans “stunted by high-fructose corn syrup and Bruce Willis films” (Hall, 2008, p. 28). She also states that they are young people impacted by “metal bands, tattoos and body piercings” (Hall, 2008, p. 64) who are looking for a self-important identity, and for whom the victim ultimately has no value.

5. It has to be pointed out that the use of force within even the “militant” animal rights movement is not nondiscriminatory. Many who participated in the survey argued that there is a clear difference between “violence” and “force” (force is easier to justify), and that even the use of force

needs to be based on solid reasoning: "Therefore force is justified in a much wider range of circumstances than violence. It is okay to disrupt something if it is immoral, or if you have a serious point to get across, for instance. Force has to be justified by the circumstances, for instance the importance or urgency of what you are trying to achieve, the degree of immorality of what you are trying to stop, or the degree to which other, less forceful, tactics have been exhausted."

6. One example of this is an advertising campaign instigated by a mainstream Finnish animal advocacy organization named Animalia, which rather moderately pointed to the welfare problems in animal industries, and which was stopped within one day after those same industries contacted the agency (JCDecaux) that had sold the advertising space. See <http://www.animalia.fi/Default.aspx?tabid=1963> (accessed June 16, 2009).

7. Common slogans like "No justice, just us" bring forward the sense of utter normative solitude.

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