

# Thin Ice\*

★ The Animal-Rights Newsletter ★

The Newsletter of Responsible Policies for Animals, Inc.

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## Getting Rights Right

*Individuals without equal basic rights lack needed protection and empowerment. But little "animal rights" advocacy promotes rights.*

By David Cantor

A few centuries ago, a few dedicated people persistently pushed the outrageous argument that the people who emptied the king's bedpan each morning were born with the same essential traits as the king. Their persistence is the reason many millions of human beings have lived with more comfort, convenience, longevity, fulfillment, and freedom from injustice and the misery it generates than at any time since humans left their original habitat and way of life many thousands of years ago.

They surely did not consider the ever-increasing injustice and misery countless nonhuman animals would experience when due to human beings' acquired individual rights, which further accelerated human overpopulation and technological impact.

Today, a few dedicated people persistently push the outrageous argument that thousands of trapped mice tossed in the trash each morning are born with the same essential traits as the people tossing them. We are animal-rights advocates, insisting (1) nonhuman animals are biological persons, and (2) that means no justification exists (only rationalization) for denying nonhuman animals the same basic individual rights that protect and empower human beings fortunate enough to have them.

### The Struggle To Understand Rights

So much confusion exists about exactly what rights are that only rarely does someone know what I mean when I say Responsible Policies for Animals (RPA) promotes animal rights. So I've taken to using the bulkier but more precise phrase *unalienable equal basic individual autonomy, ecology, and dignity rights of all animals*. That includes humans, and though equal rights of all animals will curtail some property rights and other rights some humans now possess, humans will benefit greatly by establishing nonhuman animals' rights.

Some confusion arises from such casual use of "rights" and "animal rights" as to negate any definite meaning. Often asked precisely what rights RPA promotes, I drafted a Bill of Animal Rights— see **Bill of Animal Rights** at the **Animal Rights** page of [www.RPAforAll.org](http://www.RPAforAll.org). Its phrasing resembles the Bill of Rights and subsequent rights Amendments. That is crucial because rights that do not measure up to existing rights cannot protect and empower as rights are designed to,

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## RPA, Animal Rights, and the Spoken Word

Basic human rights were established before pop culture, the Internet, TV, radio, advertising, even photography and the telegraph. Writing and speaking are the means to rights. So RPA's presentations, like the organization's literature and websites, are crucial to advancing the cause. Here are some RPA presentations, how they advance rights, and where they've taken place since the last issue of *Thin Ice*.

### Health, Ecology, and Peace: The Animal Connection

Rights of all animals will establish a new-and-improved basis for human and other-animal wellbeing. Health, environmental, and peace efforts perennially fail despite talented and dedicated people – because do not address humans' willingness to overlook nonhuman animals' basic interests – as reflected in humans' abandoning their original way of life, invading and occupying regions far from their original habitat, and more. Only equal individual rights of all animals can curtail the harm these practices inflict on humans and other animals.

Thanks to Rebecca Goth, RPA member and owner of Life Savers store and café in **Wheeling, West Virginia**, RPA founder & director David Cantor presented Health, Ecology, and Peace: The Animal Connection there on October 11<sup>th</sup>. Cantor gave the talk again in **Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania**, on October 13<sup>th</sup>, with assistance from RPA Board member Lynn Cummings.

### Health, Ecology, Peace, and Spirit: The Animal Connection

Adding spirituality to Health, Ecology, and Peace: The Animal Connection, this RPA presentation acknowledges that there is no factual basis for believing nonhuman animals lack spirituality. Human beings were not the first animals to have eyes, hearts, brains, emotions, reason, and other animal traits. There is no factual basis for believing spirituality (as distinct from religion) occurs only in humans – and much reason to believe otherwise. Teaching this reinforces nonhuman animals' biological personhood and helps people see why we should see other animals as persons, not as objects.

Thanks to long-time RPA member Caleb Wistar and members of the First Unitarian Universalist Society of Albany (FUUSA), Cantor presented Health, Ecology, Peace, and Spirit: The Animal Connection at FUUSA in Albany, New York, on October 27<sup>th</sup>.

### Meat, Our Most Insidious Institution

Non-participation in meat, dairy, fish, egg, and their allied

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\* Responsible Policies for Animals' newsletter, *Thin Ice*, gets its name from the ethical "thin ice" animal use is based on and injustice humans impose on nonhuman animals, exemplified by humans' melting of the polar ice caps.

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industries (vegetarianism) is consistent with advocating for rights but does not in itself promote rights, because it does not reframe animals as persons under the Constitution and the law, and because basic rights are not established through shopping or eating choices.

Understanding meat as an *institution* subsidized, supported, and promoted by other institutions promotes rights of all animals by showing how our land-grant universities (LGUs) and other institutions – families, news, schools, ... – perpetuate injustice by teaching false beliefs and ideologies about animals, including humans.

Thanks to RPA member and West Shore Vegetarian Group founder Cheryl Cross, Cantor presented Meat, Our Most Insidious Institution at the Group's monthly dinner meeting in **Cleveland, Ohio**, on October 12<sup>th</sup>. Thanks to Jeff Tucker, president of **EarthSave Miami**, Cantor first gave this talk at the group's August 29, 2009, dinner. EarthSave Miami also advanced RPA's 10,000 Years Is Enough campaign by urging Florida State University to end its enormous meat program.

### **This Land Is Their Land**

To lead enjoyable and fulfilling lives, human beings require rights like those in the Bill of Rights against arbitrary abuse or seizure of property by the state. Nonhuman animals require similar rights to curtail the massive onslaught of humanity driving nonhuman animals from their homes, killing them for their natural behavior, and driving their species extinct. RPA's **This Land Is Their Land** presentation explains human expansion, its impacts on humans and other animals, and benefits to humans and other animals of establishing nonhuman animals' basic individual rights.

This presentation promotes RPA's **This Land Is Their Land campaign** to protect free-living animals through fundamental change to land-use policy. It also promotes RPA's 10,000 Years Is Enough campaign to get our land-grant universities out of the meat industries: Animal use drives human invasions and occupations of regions outside of the original habitat and ever-more-rapid ecosystem disruption.

Thanks to RPA member Brandon Becker and other friends in North Carolina, Cantor presented **This Land Is Their Land** at North Carolina State University in Raleigh on November 18<sup>th</sup> and at Internationalist Books in Chapel Hill on November 19<sup>th</sup>. ★

#### ★ **What We Must Do** ★

**Help organize an RPA presentation in your community or group. It takes little of your time. RPA does most of the work. We design each talk with the particular audience in mind.**

## **RPA on the Air**

While in Wheeling to speak on **Health, Ecology, and Peace: The Animal Connection**, Cantor was a guest on the Steve Novotney Show, WKKX-AM. Cantor explained links between injustice – using nonhuman animals and disrupting their ecosystems – and human misery: Humans might never

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Responsible Policies for Animals, Inc. (RPA), promotes responsible policies for nonhuman animals that are also responsible policies for people and ecosystems: unalienable equal basic individual autonomy, ecology, and dignity rights of all animals.

RPA is a 501(c)(3) educational nonprofit organization. Monetary and in-kind donations to RPA are tax exempt as allowed by law.

RPA has no salaried staff or directors.

Anyone may become an RPA member for one year by donating \$15.00 or more. RPA considers ill, impoverished, or incarcerated people for donation-free honorary memberships on an individual basis, upon request.

RPA members receive *Thin Ice* and Updates on RPA's work. New members receive RPA's unique bumper sticker (see [www.RPAforAll.org](http://www.RPAforAll.org)).

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Donate to RPA at [www.RPAforAll.org](http://www.RPAforAll.org) or by mail.

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have experienced hundreds of infectious diseases had they not enslaved dogs, chickens, horses, cattle, pigs, and others. Influenza, smallpox, even the common cold crossed from other animals to humans. The process continues. Helping diminish public resistance to animal rights, such discussions are more useful than efforts to build mass support for a radical cause that will succeed through Constitutional amendment, not majority vote. ★

#### ★ **What We Must Do** ★

**Urge people at news venues in your area to cover animal rights by contacting RPA and learning about its work.**

## **RPA, Animal Rights, and State Legislators**

While in Raleigh to speak there and in Chapel Hill, Cantor delivered to 12 state legislators' Capitol offices information on the need to get North Carolina State University, the state's main land-grant university (LGU), out of the meat industry.

Promoting meat and its allied industries, our LGUs promote false beliefs and ideologies that perpetuate injustice against nonhuman animals and negate their biological personhood and need of rights. Animal use undermines

everything government claims to do for human health and nutrition, environmental protection, conservation, and humane treatment of nonhuman animals. So RPA informs legislators who chair education, agriculture, health care, environment, and other relevant committees.

RPA informs legislators of the LGU problem, not because they will solve it soon with legislation, but because they must understand how animal use undermines the general welfare, the common defense, and justice – key purposes of the Constitution, which all legislators swear to uphold. And because they are influential people with many links to our LGUs and other influential institutions. We must *reframe* animals in their minds to eventually establish rights of all animals. ★

★ **What We Must Do** ★

**Contact RPA if you would like to inform your state and/or federal legislators. RPA will provide literature and help fit your effort to your schedule and priorities.**

## RPA, Animal Rights, and Environmentalism

The environmental component of animal rights is not that protecting ecosystems “helps other animals as well as humans.” It is that only establishing unalienable equal basic autonomy, ecology, and dignity rights of all animals can protect ecosystems. On November 7, 2010, RPA ran an exhibit at an event celebrating the tenth anniversary of the Earth Charter, which RPA endorsed many years ago. Thanks to RPA member and longtime environmental activist Susan Curry and the Alliance for a Sustainable Future, which hosted the event at the University of Pennsylvania, RPA was able to promote animal rights as the key to ecosystem protection.

RPA’s exhibit asked, “How can we make the environmental movement and the Earth Charter succeed?” The rest, in large copy illustrated with small visual images, posed environmental questions like “Why is global warming killing hundreds of thousands of human beings each year?” Each question was answered, “*Because nonhuman animals lack basic autonomy, ecology, and dignity rights.*” Participants received free RPA literature, including a factsheet containing the same text as the display – available free on request. ★

★ **What We Must Do** ★

**Popular environmentalism cannot create the needed fundamental change. Use RPA literature, websites, and presentations to show environmentalists the crucial difference between rights and other ways to protect and empower. Discuss with RPA.**

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and can only perpetuate the millennia-long speciesist double standards and tyranny that account for nonhuman animals’ horrible plight under the human boot today. To talk of rights unlike those in the Constitution is to talk of “cows” with toes, “cars” that fly from town to town, “rivers” that grow like trees. You get the idea: Words have precise meanings –

“rights” no less than others.

RPA’s assertion that only rights can afford individuals meaningful protection and empowerment is not a claim that mere rights language on a document in the National Archives protects and empowers people. Rights culture and eternal vigilance are necessary. The vast majority of citizens dedicate themselves to amusements, distractions, and consumerism rather than public affairs. So it is not surprising that rights are deteriorating. A new Jim Crow has arisen – millions of nonwhites stopped, frisked, and imprisoned for minor violations of drug laws which arguably are unconstitutional in the first place. But cases are thrown out of court every day, and convictions reversed on appeal, due to rights violations by the state, and procedures in place due to rights prevent injustices that otherwise would occur on a massive scale as they do where rights are lacking.

Nor does the failure to achieve equal outcomes or prevent all violence and injustice negate rights’ value and importance: Basic rights are not designed for those purposes but to enable people to pursue their interests, serve their communities, and lead fulfilling lives with a reasonable expectation that they will not be punished for how they choose to do so.

I believe *animal rights is the idea and political proposal most capable of reigniting humans’ natural concern for justice.* Humans naturally respect other animals as they do each other. Institutional incentives to suppress our natural empathy and respect account for most preventable suffering. A radically new configuration of rights is the solution, including no rights of corporations – nonliving entities.

### The Struggle To Promote Rights

RPA’s work to establish rights of all animals is based on some crucial facts that elude many people, including me through many years of full-time animal advocacy:

➤ **Rights are not mere prohibitions against violence and abuse but structural components of governance, an institution designed to protect against tyranny and empower all individual persons to lead fulfilling lives according to their capabilities.**

➤ **Rights must be established before it can be possible to abolish the injustices that harm, kill, and oppress non-rights-holders – abolitionist animal advocacy and veganism (non-participation in animal use), like the animal-welfare system, are not effective strategies for establishing rights.**

➤ **The struggle to establish equal individual rights of the many as the basis of governance involved showing the elite few that they, too, would fare better, and society as a whole would function better, once equal individual rights were established. Likewise, a crucial component of animal-rights advocacy must be to show the public and those most involved in managing the public mind that establishing rights of all animals is the only likely way to solve big human problems like war, poverty, genocide, pollution, water and soil depletion, disease, soaring medical and insurance costs, oppression of women, children, nonwhites, and other human groups, and extreme economic inequality.**

Establishing and expanding basic rights – establishing new persons under the Constitution and the law – is usually

the work of a small number of dedicated people – a radical activity, threatening institutions, the cash stream, dominant mental framing of animals, including humans – and the livelihoods of people who publicly promote rights of nonhumans. That is why RPA (1) does not identify its supporters without their express permission; (2) does not strive to make animal rights a popular mass movement prematurely – a longtime error of many advocates; and (3) promotes rights the way they have been promoted successfully in the past – through the written and spoken word.

Leading with bleeding – horrifying visual images of nonhuman animals suffering at human hands – powerfully stimulates outrage, revenge, punishment, emergency action, us-versus-them – mental frames not conducive to the struggle for rights. Mental frames conducive to rights include justice, fairness, respect, rule of law, forgiveness – human traits and concepts reinforced through reason. Visual images bypass reason. Words promote the long-term dedication required to establish rights; visual images promote reflexive short-term action incapable of affecting rights or other institutions.

### Putting the “War” before the “Battles”

Unlike many other struggles – and counterintuitive – the “war” for rights of all animals must be won *before* the crucial “battles” to protect and empower other animals can be effectively fought. Individual rights are the *basis* – not the *result* – of eradicating tyranny and promoting individual fulfillment.

Confusion about this basic strategic matter is widespread, partly due to misuse of the analogy between human slavery and oppression of nonhuman animals. Common wisdom among *abolitionist* animal advocates (RPA is not abolitionist) holds that the Abolition movement and Emancipation conferred rights on former slaves. This overlooks the crucial facts that (1) vast numbers of slaves and their descendants remained without basic rights after Emancipation, free in name only; (2) rights culture that emerged before the Bill of Rights (Washington commanded Continental soldiers to treat British prisoners with dignity and respect, for example) blossomed after, inspiring the Abolition movement to end human slavery nationwide as a Constitutional matter, not merely state by state as a moral imperative. Abolition *resulted from* – did not lead to – establishment of individual rights as the basis of governance.

Dog-fighting, puppy mills, laboratory tests & experiments, extremely inhumane killing of rats and mice, meat, fur, fishing, hunting, organized deer and goose kills, and so much other injustice: The battles thousands of advocates wage on behalf of nonhuman animals make so little headway *because the nonhuman victims do not have rights and are not persons under the law* – not because humans do not care about other animals or do not realize what is going on.

### Helping Animals “Now”

Most advocates who want nonhuman animals to lead good lives trade what we *want* for what we want *now*. Moved by horrible suffering and knowing humans inflict it on a massive scale, we naturally respond with compassion and outrage. We don’t want to wait for rights. Some, even

while calling themselves “animal rights” advocates, say nonhuman animals *will never have rights*. *You can’t effectively promote what you say is unachievable*.

It is impossible to end the worst abuses without instituting rights of all animals. Human minds, institutions, industries, and economies are such that only the strict formal boundaries that rights erect against tyranny can conceivably put the vast majority of nonhuman animals beyond the reach of humans and the tyranny they have imposed on others for tens of thousands of years. The only nonhumans we can help *now* are those in our immediate reach – usually due to the oppression and debasement inherent in breeding and enslavement; in the case of free-living animals, unjust capturing or injuring. People have helped injured or abandoned nonhuman animals for thousands of years without reference to rights. Helping them without establishing their rights is one reason they are so egregiously oppressed today: They were made into property.

**“[A] crucial component of animal-rights advocacy must be to show the public and those most involved in managing the public mind that establishing rights of all animals is the only likely way to solve big human problems like war, poverty, genocide, pollution ....”**

Many advocates believe fighting cruelty and promoting veganism help animals who need help *now* while promoting rights abandons animals in need for a distant goal that might be impossible to achieve. *Reality check*: The animals’ plight has steadily worsened since the animal-welfare system began; almost every form of animal use, including the most inhumane, has continued to increase since organized abolitionist animal advocacy began; and due to nonhumans’ persistent lack of rights, every imaginable form of animal use remains an option for anyone who might invent the proverbial “better mouse trap.” In contrast, many people find animal rights positive and exciting compared to lame exhortations against cruelty and negative abolitionist advocacy. People easily “put to and two together,” saying things to me like, “It sounds like I’d better adopt a vegan lifestyle” – after a presentation where I’ve promoted rights of all animals, not veganism.

Quadrillions of nonhuman animals are yet to exist. They can only experience the good lives they deserve if we succeed in establishing their basic individual rights. We must make the case for their rights with persistence and discipline, as described elsewhere in this issue of *Thin Ice* and past issues, and through action in RPA’s **10,000 Years Is Enough** and **This Land Is Their Land** campaigns. Help those within your reach – I keep leash, box, bed sheet, and other rescue items in my car in case I discover an animal in need. And for the animals’ sake, I drive as little as possible. But I no longer confuse helping with establishing rights. ★

**RPA’s directors thank you for supporting the organized effort to establish unalienable equal basic individual autonomy, ecology, and dignity rights of all animals.**