

What Is and Is Not Animal-Rights Advocacy

Fundamental or basic rights are constitutional provisions established to protect individuals against tyranny and empower them to lead fulfilling lives. Secondary rights, based on fundamental rights, are established through statutes and court decisions. Rights advocates work to establish rights that do not yet exist and/or promote enforcement or expansion of existing rights. Animal-rights advocacy aims to establish basic rights since no nonhuman being has basic rights today. Calling other advocacy “animal rights” is one of the main obstacles to the rights the animals need. Animal-rights advocacy can eventually protect and empower, but it will take a long time. Other animal advocacy can help small numbers of animals but can never establish rights.

Animal-Rights Advocacy

The problem: nonhuman animals lack basic individual rights and therefore respect.

The goal: basic rights – to live according to one’s species’ original biological nature and not to be used, owned, contaminated, or driven from one’s home by humans or human-generated nonliving entities. Fundamental change.

The strategy: Create a new, empirical understanding of animals, including humans; the status quo as injustice and delusion; and benefits to all animals, including humans, of establishing equal basic individual rights of all animals regardless of species. Create a new animalism.

Belief behind the strategy (true): No one without rights can have meaningful protection against tyranny and suffering it causes; rights diminish tyranny, empathy suppression, and inhumane practice, increasing respect; rights are established through enlightenment, education, and fundamental change to institutions.

Tactics: Through the spoken and written word, reframe concerns for animals in terms of equality-justice-rights (rather than crime-punishment or consumerism); undermine consumerist and corporatist approaches. Avoid blame and superior attitude; practice forgiveness; respect all animals, including humans. The medium is the message.

Prognosis: Fundamental change, like establishing basic rights of all of Earth’s other animals after thousands of years of human supremacy, takes a very long time and cannot be achieved through superficial-change strategies, consumerism, or mass appeal; progress toward basic rights occurs in the human brain-mind and is not visible early on; the trajectory is toward basic rights, if a small group of people will dedicate themselves to the struggle.

Other Animal Advocacy

The problem: Welfarism: “cruelty” and “animal abuse.” Abolitionism: animal use.

The goal: Welfarism: stricter animal-welfare laws and enforcement; less cruelty. Abolitionism: an end to animal-using industries; less animal abuse since use is abuse. Superficial change.

The strategy: Welfarism: Urge officials to improve laws and enforcement; urge people to support the effort. Abolitionism: urge nonparticipation in businesses shown to cause nonhumans to suffer; promote bans where feasible.

Belief behind the strategy (untrue): Welfarism: Cruelty, the main cause of nonhumans’ suffering at human hands, can be effectively fought without nonhumans’ obtaining basic rights. Abolitionism: Animal-using industries can be eliminated through awareness-raising; veganism diminishes animal use and suffering and can lead to rights.

Tactics: Welfarism: Reinforce crime-punishment mental frame, one form of “animal abuse” at a time. Abolitionism: Reinforce suffering-empathy mental frame. Both: Build support for animal-advocacy institutions and activities by decrying cruelty and reinforcing optimism bias. Use “animal rights” incorrectly to mean wishes rather than strategy, language, and institutions.

Prognosis: No matter how many people dedicate themselves to welfarism or abolitionism, nonhumans’ plight worsens as long as they lack basic rights – due to the ever-growing human population and humans’ and corporations’ rights in nonhumans and Earth’s wealth. Victories for nonhumans are not progress toward their rights. The appearance of progress prevents advocates from studying and promoting rights needed for actual progress.

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Responsible Policies for Animals, Inc. ★ www.RPAforAll.org ★ RPA4all@aol.com ★ 215-886-RPA1

★ P.O. Box 891, Glenside, PA 19038, USA ★