



## Moral Injury, the Morality Paradox, and Animal Rights

*We can't eliminate civilization just because it is based on animal abuse. We can't return to our species' original lifeway. And we can't reduce animal abuse by fighting it and exhorting people as in standard animal advocacy. But we can recognize the problem's deep and pervasive roots and deception behind it, and dedicate ourselves to methods that can work over time.*

By David Cantor

The first wave of the “animal rights movement,” mired in activities unrelated to establishing rights of new groups of persons, is based on a conventional definition of animal abuse as individual acts that kill or hurt nonhuman animals. Such acts are documented in slaughterhouses, factory farms, biomedical-experiment

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“Compassion, caring, moralizing, and conscientious objection ... do not touch the forces that ... fuel animal abuse ....”

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and product-testing laboratories, fur farms, puppy mills, cock- and dog-fighting rings, and elsewhere. First-wave activists distinguish between “animal abusers” and those of us who “go vegan,” deal “humanely” with “human-wildlife conflicts,” otherwise avoid participating in “cruelty,” and thus are deemed

“caring,” “compassionate,” “making a difference.”

One problem with that approach to animal advocacy is that it doesn't reduce animal abuse or suffering – the “difference” occurs only in the imagination and propaganda. Billions of hours, dollars, and items of literature, video, and photography, all variety of moralizing and persuasion combined, do not reduce animal abuse. Nor do they change the thinking that perpetuates the animal-abuse infrastructure on its global scale.

Another problem is that the mass decrying of the most obvious abuses

of nonhuman animals – *atrocities* – obscures the full scope of animal abuse: everything human beings do to and with other animals and their natural homes.

### Defining “Abuse” Truthfully

By the full meaning of “abuse” – *maltreatment* – our species' abuse of other animals has increased with no letup for more than 50,000 years, since it became routine for human beings to manufacture weapons and organize to kill their natural predators, gradually making every place

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## RPA Conference Presentations and Exhibit

This year at the annual conference AR2017, RPA founder & director David Cantor gave presentations on panels titled Animal Personhood, Getting To Know Our Adversaries, and Power of Traditional Media. The panels were very well attended. Many who learned about RPA's exhibit at the conference visited the table and picked up free RPA brochures and white papers. About forty people added their names to RPA's email list.

RPA's directors are grateful to those who learned about the organization at AR2017 and have since provided invaluable assistance such as recommending RPA for university presentations and distributing RPA fliers to urge land-grant-university boosters to end “animal science” and get out of the meat, dairy, fish, and egg industries. ★

on Earth safe for humans and agriculture through ever more animal abuse. Standard animal advocacy does not touch the forces that perpetuate animal abuse, overwhelming the humane impulse with massive industrial momentum, economic dependence on animal abuse, human population growth and expansion, and ideologies holding human beings entitled to all in nature, other beings inferior and unworthy of a fulfilling life.

But if the animal-abuse problem doesn't amount to a lack of caring or a failure to get enough people to care, then what makes it so hard to reduce animal abuse, and how can people take part in the effort?

From nearly three decades' experience as a full-time animal advocate, reading in many relevant areas and mulling over countless responses to standard advocacy, I believe (1) civilization and all of its institutions teach that all animal abuse is *good* except cruelty perpetrated for the purpose of causing pain and suffering, and (2) human societies and their power structures are based on and dependent upon animal abuse. Rather than confront reality and move toward a less inhumane civilization, author-

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ities undermine our species' innate morality and our natural affinity for other beings (biophilia) to maintain animal-abuse policy, culture, and practice – and their own status and prospects.

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Reducing animal abuse requires us to reckon with those daunting realities.

**Two Moralities**

As I've come to see it, there are two versions of human morality: our innate morality and its distorted and perverted cousin courtesy of civilization and its institutions. Civilization's dominant individuals, classes, interests, factions, and the institutions and industries they control play on certain aspects of our innate morality to maintain power, wealth, and status and to keep the vast majority subjugated. Accomplishing all of this among billions of moral apes, when it constricts their quality of life, requires constant promotion of illusory beliefs ensuring that humans live in a state of unreality.

A term coined by a psychologist at

the Veterans Administration – *moral injury* – illuminates the confusion of naturally compassionate, empathetic, kind, altruistic, generous apes pressured by civilization to tolerate, accept, fund, participate in, and partake of practices that harm other human beings, nonhuman animals, and the living world. As yet, “moral injury” is mainly used to denote soldiers' experience of doing something unconscionable in war when the government tells them they will do good. But there is no linguistic basis for limiting the phrase to that use. Morality is involved in all that humans do, not only in war. And if authorities can injure people by having them do bad things to humans in war, they also can injure them by having them perpetuate a millennia-long Biocaust on nonhuman animals and the living world.

Destroying human beings' homes by bulldozer, bomb, or fire inflicts terror, pain, and death; doing the same to nonhuman animals' homes does that too. Poisoning the water human beings drink causes incalculable suffering to humans; poisoning the water other animals drink or live in does the same to them. Taking away human beings' autonomy causes them to suffer and prevents them from leading fulfilling lives; taking away other animals' autonomy does the same to them. But for thousands of years human beings have been taught that it is *good* or morally neutral to abuse nonhuman animals in those ways and many others – because doing so advances humans' material interests.

### The Morality Paradox

Moral injury hurts deeply and persistently. Victims suffer from a guilty

bad) to do, we question our worth as human beings, that of others who live as we do, that of our ancestors who established the components of our inhumane lifeway, and the trajectory civilization is on, with all of our contributions – our work, our taxes, our service to others.

When people object to, or refuse to discuss, animal-advocacy messages, insisting their practices and institutions are fine as they are and we owe nonhuman animals no particular thought, it isn't because they "don't care." It's because acknowledging the enormity and intensity of nonhuman animals' suffering at human hands entails recognizing themselves and those around them as perpetrators when they've been taught all their lives that everything they do in pursuit of a better life for self, family, community, and country is good. Highly sophisticated apes, humans

thousands of other animals' natural ones, if getting where I need to go crushes nonhuman animals on strips of asphalt and breaks down their

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## Educating Teachers' Associations

It is impossible to make progress toward a reduction in animal abuse or slowing of the Biocaust as long as our institutions, including our massive K-12 school system, continue to promote animal-abuse culture, rationalizing practices that harm nonhuman animals, perpetuate their enslavement, and prevent them from leading fulfilling lives.

In September 2017, RPA mailed its Campaign K-12 white paper, “Schooling for Life: How Our K-12 Schools Can Help End Our Species' Millennia-Long Animal-Abuse Policy, Annihilation of Nature, and Resulting Human Misery,” to about eighty teachers' associations in the fifty states and U.S. territories. The letter accompanying the white paper explained the urgency of teaching children the truth about human nature, other animals, the living world, and suffering and destruction caused by our species' animal-abuse policy, culture, and practice.

Previously, RPA sent “Schooling for Life” to all fifty states' education departments and to several teachers who expressed interest in reading it. We continue to circulate and promote “Schooling for Life.”

Feel welcome to copies of the white paper to distribute, or email the link: [www.rpaforall.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/schooling-for-life-1st-edition.pdf](http://www.rpaforall.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/schooling-for-life-1st-edition.pdf). It's bulky to type out but easy to highlight the link and copy into an email from RPA's website: [www.RPAforAll.org](http://www.RPAforAll.org). ★

conscience. Part of being a moral ape is the need to see oneself and to be seen by others as *good*. When we question what authorities and institutions tell us is good (or at least not

immediately grasp the implications: If it turns out I'm a natural herbivore unnaturally and speciously conditioned to eat from animals, if my unnatural home is made from

climate – then I and my lifeway are bad, not good.

Far more appealing than assessing the morality of civilization, its institutions, and its lifeways is avoiding the matter altogether and deriding those who insist on confronting reality, the incalculable suffering caused by our lifeways. To describe the avoidance-and-denial option, I coined the term *the morality paradox*. Paradoxically, to maintain one's self-perception as essentially good, one must insist that extremely harmful things one is part of are good, not bad; right, not wrong. One must abandon one's moral capacity altogether, acting as if moral facts were mere matters of individual opinion like whether corn chips are better than tortilla chips.

Paradoxically, moral apes with an immense capacity for moral perception and reasoning perpetuate their immoral practices with regard to nonhuman animals because they are too horrible to contemplate. Conscience surrenders to consumerism as the question of what one prefers to do supplants the question of what is the right thing to do. The industry-government-university-media complex promotes this morality-abandonment endeavor by pretending all lawful

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practices are morally equal and that free enterprise is a moral basis for civilization.

### **Civilization: Can't Live without It, Can't Deny Its Abuses**

Civilization's depredations on non-human animals are somewhat like the behavior of serial sexual abusers – "everyone knows" but the matter is suppressed owing to perceived interests of all concerned. But would a gradual civilization rollback be so terrible for the human animal? Civilization generates suffering in far greater variety, intensity, and longevity than humans in nature endured or even imagined. In nature, when humans lived naked, weaponless, and wordless on the African savanna foraging for plants to eat and ever alert to predators – the main danger and source of pain, suffering, grief, and early death – today's abundant causes of human misery were not even imagined, and they are rooted in animal abuse.

AIDS, Ebola, MERS, flu, smallpox, bubonic plague, anthrax – nearly every infectious disease we can name come to humans from civilization's animal-abuse policy, culture, and practice, direct contact with other animals being innovation, not natural

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behavior. Original humans would not have imagined their descendants jumping from burning buildings, gassing millions of people in cham-

## **RPA Anti-Violence Newspaper Article**

A longstanding cliché holds that human beings are natural killers. But science has long debunked the "man the hunter" myth – word just hasn't much gotten around, so the false and harmful version persists, needlessly perpetuating unnatural violent behavior toward humans and other animals.

The November 2, 2017, issue of the *Chestnut Hill Local*, a major community newspaper in Philadelphia, includes RPA founder & director David Cantor's op-ed article "Mass Shootings Do Not Reflect Human Nature."

Invoking leading authorities, the article explains how we know it is not natural for human beings to kill each other or other animals. Here is a link to the op-ed piece: <http://www.chestnuthilllocal.com/2017/11/02/mass-shootings-do-not-reflect-human-nature/>

Feel welcome to ask RPA for copies by mail and the text and link by email. ★

bers and from the air, ten times more humans living in refugee camps than existed on Earth when agriculture began, "mole people" living in storm drains, subway tunnels, air shafts, and other desolate and dangerous places, a mass food-production industry destroying ocean life, sickening humans, and subjecting trillions of nonhuman animals to sustained agony. Hundreds of millions of humans have lived as slaves, more today than at any other time in the past.

We can think of far more items for the list. In short, the vast majority of human beings have suffered terribly in civilization; civilization has benefited a fortunate minority as compared with the original human lifeway with no expectation of anything more or other than the natural lifeway. I observe free-living nonhuman animals routinely. They appear more content than humans saddled with all kinds of unnatural anxieties, fears, traumas, obligations, and manufactured and unmet needs.

### **What Can We Do?**

RPA's campaigns are designed to ensure that our institutions – especially schools, universities, and news – will stop teaching false and harmful beliefs that perpetuate animal abuse. The organization's educational literature and activities urge people to

adopt a new way of perceiving and understanding all animals, including human beings, as persons and as innately equal. RPA's website and many issues of *Persons* (and *Thin Ice* before the newsletter name changed) explain how we promote an entirely new paradigm.

Discuss with me how you might take part in RPA's campaigns or educational activities, based on your available time. All of the atrocities decried by the first wave of the "animal rights movement" since the late 1970s persist today, most on a larger scale. We cannot reduce animal abuse by snipping at twigs; we must strike at the root. As Reinhold Niebuhr said, anything worth doing cannot be achieved in one lifetime. But if we don't match our actions to our purposes and goals, we can't even get started. ★

*Thank you for  
your support,  
and have a  
wonderful 2018!*