



## To Reduce Animal Abuse, Emphasize Human Misery

*It is urgent that animal advocacy change strategy. Animal abuse steadily increases without letup. Human misery increases along with animal abuse, because it is rooted in and generated by animal abuse. The cruelty-vs.-compassion model doesn't work -- radical policy demands are needed.*

By David Cantor

For thirteen years before I founded Responsible Policies for Animals, from 1989 to 2002, I was privileged to work with a great many animal advocates within the prominent organizations that employed me, at allied organizations, and with activists throughout the U.S. In addition to learning about every kind of atrocity human beings perpetrate on other animals and many means of protesting them, I've never found a world of people more dedicated to others' wellbeing, more ethically minded, or better informed about matters they work on than animal advocates. Thirty-two years in, it is partly in sympathy with the animal-advocacy community that I find deeply distressing the ever-worsening plight of animals and standard animal advocacy's inability to improve it.

Despite stricter anticruelty laws, animals rescued from horrendous abuse and living conditions, complaints regularly filed under the federal Animal Welfare Act, spreading knowledge of nonhuman animals' rich mental, familial, and social lives, billions of dollars, hours, and items of literature and video, frequent news coverage, significant support for animal organizations, easy reality-sharing by the internet, and more people eating plants-only and going easier on free-living animals in home and garden, far more animal abuse takes place today than when the "animal rights movement" was

proclaimed at the end of the 1970s. All day every day, I receive news of atrocities against nonhuman animals and requests for action exactly the same as what circulated three decades ago. The big atrocity industries continue to grow. A question I struggle with daily is, How is it possible to reduce animal abuse rather than only lament, decry, protest, and punish it?

From long advocacy experience and study of how various kinds of change occur, I see four main inter-related errors in standard animal advocacy: defining the problem – animal abuse – too narrowly; blindness to established methods' inability to make progress toward the needed change – a reduction in animal abuse; failing to emphasize the suffering of the animals humans care about the most – themselves and each other – as the most compelling reason to reduce animal abuse; and urging compassion among the general public rather than demanding that institutions change animal-abuse policies. Grasping the reasons standard advocacy is failing should make solutions I propose plausible even if difficult and requiring long effort to make discernible progress.

### Defining the Problem

To solve a problem, we must define it accurately and comprehensively. Abuse means maltreatment; it needn't be deliberate, cruel, or horrific. Civ-

ilization is built on the maltreatment of nonhuman animals – tearing down their homes to till the soil; making their homes into structures for humans; destroying animals perceived as dangerous to people, food supplies, or property; lacing ecosystems with toxic and hazardous waste; capturing, breeding, and managing nonhuman animals; crushing animals with auto-

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mobiles. A comprehensive definition of animal abuse is *everything human beings do to and with other animals and their natural homes and ecosystems*. All such doings are unnatural, foisting on nonhuman animals experiences and conditions that cause them to suffer, to die prematurely, to lose their natural families, ecosystems, and lifeways, and to lead unfulfilling lives.

As Joyce Carol Oates says, “evil is not always repellent but frequently attractive.” Once we view animal

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abuse comprehensively, we can see that without animal abuse we couldn't have automobiles, computers, violins, baseballs, houses, furniture, vacuum cleaners, schools, hospitals, vacation resorts, movies, or any of the other comforts, conveniences, protections, remedies, or joys of civilization. I love books, but there is no denying that every page I turn comes from a nonhuman animal's natural home. Same with the musical instruments I play. Only when human beings lived by their original animal nature on the African savanna – naked, weaponless, foraging for naturally growing plants to eat, on guard for predators and venomous animals – did they live without routinely abusing nonhuman animals.

### **Faulty Definition Breeds Faulty Methods**

To the detriment of its own cause, standard animal advocacy uses "animal abuse" interchangeably with cruelty to animals. Cruelty to animals – done for the purpose of causing pain and suffering, affecting relatively few nonhuman animals, providing no human benefits, and widely condemned – is unlawful. All other animal abuse is lawful, affecting, as I've come to see it, all animals on Earth and forever increasing along with the human population, human affluence, and technological innovation. Speaking out against "cruel" factory farming, hunting, fishing, and trapping, "cruel" experiments, "cruel" fur, down, feather, and leather production, and "cruel" "pest control" doesn't bring prosecutions, bans, or shutdowns.

Urging compassion for nonhuman animals moves very few people, a small percentage of the most sensitive and empathetic, to change shopping choices, personal practices, or lifestyles. Moralizing, virtue-signaling, and disparaging others as uncaring persuade few. Victories achieved by bullying (as Jane Goodall puts it) don't change minds, and they leave intact civilization's animal-abuse policy, the policy all others are predicated upon. The cruelty-versus-compassion model fuels a backlash against animal advocacy which, unbeknownst to

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*Persons* cover art: Rebecca Lotka and David Cantor.

Defining animal abuse as everything human beings do to and with other animals and their natural homes and ecosystems, recognizing animal abuse as both the basis of civilization and the root cause of human misery, and acknowledging that standard animal advocacy cannot achieve a reduction in animal abuse, Responsible Policies for Animals (RPA) brings new and original methods to the endeavor.

RPA demands that institutions, thought leaders, and the industry-government-university-media complex stop promoting animal abuse and speciesism and become anti-speciesist – for the sake of human beings, the other animals, and Earth. RPA uses its website, correspondence, literature, meetings, group presentations, *Persons*, and other means to advance its campaigns and to teach others RPA's methods.

RPA members donate \$25 or more and receive *Persons*, e-Updates, and RPA's unique bumper sticker and brochures. On request, RPA considers ill, indigent, or imprisoned persons for donation-free honorary membership. Learn more and donate tax-free at [www.RPAforAll.org](http://www.RPAforAll.org) or by mail.



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most advocates, began to stymie "the movement" from the beginning. Vast majorities of people use the products and practices targeted by standard animal advocacy; they don't see themselves and each other as cruel.

Perhaps most importantly for grasping the need to change strategy, all of our institutions *promote* animal abuse – because civilization and its endeavors are based on and depend upon animal abuse. Families,

schools, universities, religions, civic and youth groups -- explicitly and implicitly, our institutions reenact through the generations a hodge-podge of animal-abuse ideologies constructed over thousands of years. When Aristotle articulated the Great Chain of Being, stating among other things that human beings are innately superior to all other animals and are entitled to own, exploit, and abuse

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# Basic Principles for a New Strategy

These basic principles point the way to needed changes in animal advocacy – for human beings, all other animals, and the living world.

- ▶ All animals are innately equal, and all are persons – bodies inherently worthy of respect.
- ▶ Human beings are not biologically entitled to other animals or to do anything that abuses nonhuman animals.
- ▶ Animal abuse, the granddaddy of all megaproblems, is a defining feature of civilization, not a marginal phenomenon perpetrated by a few bad people.
- ▶ Animal abuse is the root of nearly all human misery.
- ▶ All animal abuse – everything human beings do to and with other animals and their natural homes and ecosystems – is unnatural. Living unnaturally inevitably causes suffering.

▶ Civilization must stop promoting animal abuse, human supremacy, and speciesism. Institutions – families, schools, universities, religions, youth and civic groups, industry, news, entertainment, advertising, public relations – must become anti-speciesist to reverse the steady increase in animal abuse and resulting human misery.

▶ If animal abuse is ever to be reduced due to organized, mindful human endeavor, animal advocacy must demand policy change in every institution, not rely on personal traits like compassion. ★

**Responsible Policies for Animals offers free presentations on these matters to groups of all kinds.**

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them, he didn't create the idea whole cloth. He just described how humans had already been living and thinking for thousands of years. People needn't study Aristotle or the Chain to internalize the message: Corpses, ruins, toxic wastelands, and means of abuse are all around us. Have a peek at TV's *America's Funniest Home Videos* – audiences laugh uproariously at fish suffering on hooks or flopping on the ground, debased and ridiculed pets, and more.

No wonder the backlash against “animal rights” and plants-only eating is so strident and there is so little support for “animal rights” four decades after “the movement” was proclaimed. Urging a halt to any form of animal abuse challenges the essence and privilege of being human, as most people see it, as well as the basis of the global capitalist dictatorship which we all depend on for our medium of exchange. All suffering animals deserve remedies, but only very few can be reached by compassion. Abuse is policy. Civilization represents radical change for the worse by degrees over a great expanse of time. A radical justice movement is required to challenge “human progress.”

## Highlight Human Suffering

Most animal advocates know two links between animal abuse and human suffering: Getting away with cruelty to animals in one's youth (*actual* cruelty, not the broad scope of animal abuse erroneously called cruelty in standard animal advocacy) indicates psychopathology and predicts violence toward human beings later in life, and eating from animals causes many of the worst noncommunicable diseases in humans.

Really, though, just about all human misery is rooted in animal abuse. And human beings care more about their own and each other's suffering than about the suffering of nonhuman animals. With animal abuse such a tough nut to crack and a part of every human endeavor, animal advocacy can gain better purchase on the human mind by demanding that our institutions stop erasing animal abuse from human consciousness and instead clarify its centrality to our suffering. Following are some of the ways animal abuse causes human misery.

Just about every infectious human disease we can name comes from our species' deliberate contact with other animals – all of which is abuse.

Examples include COVID-19, AIDS, influenza, bubonic plague, tuberculosis, anthrax, smallpox, and chicken pox/shingles.

Every assault on human beings based on defamation – racism, sexism, Islamophobia, antisemitism, homophobia, and so forth – is rooted in the Animal-Abuse Revolution, initiated when prehistoric humans began organizing to kill their natural predators and other potentially dangerous animals with manufactured weapons. To make this violent divergence from natural human morality acceptable, humans invented ideologies defaming other animals, designating humans the only *persons*, the only ones worthy of respect. Human eliminationist and terrorist campaigns – Nazi Holocaust, Khmer Rouge, Jim Crow, Rwanda, and many more – always portray human victims as less than human, calling them names long established in the human mind as detestable and unworthy of life: swine, vermin, rats, cockroaches, serpents, and others. Hence widespread readiness to unleash violence on “our fellow human beings.”

Humans would not experience horrible burns, amputations, broken bones, paralysis, loss of loved ones,

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and other calamities due to automobiles if not for the long-accepted animal abuse involved in using and manufacturing automobiles. We can apply this observation to civilization's countless other products.

Because our institutions erase animal abuse from human consciousness altogether, it requires constant effort to see it as the primary cause of human suffering. If we consider the human plight honestly, seeing past the forced optimism of our institutions' constant whitewashing, we can see that solutions for humans-only are not working any more than the ones standard animal advocacy promotes for other animals. War abounds with no end in sight. So do school shootings, suicides, depression, anxiety, isolation, and loneliness. Diseases continue emerging and spreading. Animal abuse breaks down the climate, and in turn, climate breakdown abuses all animals, including humans.

This short list gives the basic idea. Humans need all of our institutions to stop whitewashing and greenwashing civilization and to tell the most troubling truth: Civilization is based on animal abuse, and animal abuse is the root of nearly all human misery. Animal advocacy is the organized human endeavor best informed and suited to demand such radical change.

### **Equal Remedies for Equal Beings**

Remedies for other animals must resemble remedies for human beings – not because humans care as much about other animals as about themselves and each other; they certainly do not – but because the mechanics of tyranny and abuse don't change with species. Everyone under tyranny, human or nonhuman, is abused – partly by tyranny itself, which negates the autonomy and dignity of naturally self-governing human and nonhuman persons; partly by the physical and mental abuse that tyranny generates.

Imagine what our lives in the U.S. and in other places with governing constitutions based on the American Revolution (ongoing, as distinct from the War of Independence) would be

like if we depended on tyrants' compassion rather than equality-based policy. Human beings are *de facto* tyrants over all of Earth's other animals. Standard animal advocacy doesn't reduce animal abuse because nonhuman animals have no rights; equal rights, though they require perpetual implementation, enforcement, and recourse against violations, are the only policy humans have invented to this point that has begun to free humans from thousands of years of tyranny.

Establishing equal rights is the start, not the end point, for reducing

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**“All of our institutions promote animal abuse.”**

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abuse of a rights-denied group. The proclaimed “animal rights movement” has never made progress toward equal rights of all animals, and compassion can't establish rights. Ensuring that our institutions teach the innate equality and personhood of all animals, undermining human supremacy and speciesism, can begin to reduce animal abuse and eventually establish equal rights of all animals.

### **Tall Order!**

The megaproblem of animal abuse is so vast and so integral to civilization that solutions might be impossible regardless of our organized efforts. We don't know, because no large organization or significant number of advocates has yet applied the strategy RPA has pioneered on too small a scale for a conclusive test. It is *not* too soon to tell that the methods of standard animal advocacy cannot reduce animal abuse. For many years, I have explained these matters to fellow animal advocates. Colleagues at prominent national organizations and throughout the U.S. mostly drop out of the conversation the moment they grasp that I am saying animal

advocacy is neither reducing animal abuse nor promoting rights. I have been shouted down at some presentations. Conference attendees forever rally around established methods reaffirmed by celebrity advocates. Groupthink appears to have animal advocacy firmly in its grip.

Snipping at twigs brings people together in common cause, creating collegiality and optimism. Victories and improvements to a small number of animals' lives and a few people “going vegan” (fewer than 0.5 percent of Americans today) provide an illusion of progress. It might not be so appealing to strike at the roots in an unpopular endeavor so radical as to be stonewalled and rejected outright for the foreseeable future. But all endeavors that advance the struggle for justice are initially rejected. None that shrinks from the whole truth succeeds.

Consider showing this issue of *Persons* to animal advocates or organization directors whose work you support, asking if they can refute with facts anything stated in it. If they cannot, consider what I say here to be true, even if it is difficult to accept. I am glad to email you the newsletter for easy circulation.

### **Want To Learn More?**

Principles, strategies, tactics, vocabularies, and work already done along the lines that I recommend in this issue of *Persons* are explained at [www.RPAforAll.org](http://www.RPAforAll.org), in RPA's brochures *Human Misery: The Animal-Abuse Factor*, *Animal Knowing*, and *Guide to Animal Rights*, my essay “Beyond Humanism, Toward a New Animalism,” my *Dissident Voice* articles “Let's Use the Brains We Were Born With” and “Racist Ideology and Practice Rooted in Speciesism,” and elsewhere. Don't hesitate to let me know if you have questions, difficulty locating any of these sources, or interest in more sources. Hard copies of many items are available free by mail on request from RPA. ★

**Thank you for making Responsible Policies for Animals possible.**