

# Letters

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## **Animals as a Minority**

A forthcoming article entitled "Animals as a Minority" written by Dale Jamieson and myself tentatively scheduled to appear in the September issue of *Humanity & Society* has particular relevance to the Fox-Mason dialogue concerning animal rights/animal liberation (*Int J Stud Anim Prob* 2(4):168-170, 1981).

In it, we suggest that for analytical purposes minorities can be categorized on the basis of the overriding rationale behind their unequal treatment: The Protected, The Combatted, and The Exploited.

Groups that have been perceived and singled out as in need of help or protection because of some handicap or infirmity fall within the *Protected* type: the mentally ill, the mentally retarded, women, children, the elderly.

Groups that have been perceived and singled out as a threat to the majority from whom society must be protected constitute the *Combatted* type: criminals, the mentally ill, juvenile delinquents.

Groups that are permitted to remain in a disadvantaged state for purposes of exploitation comprise the *Exploited* type: blacks and other racial minorities, ethnics, women.

A minority may fit as well in one category as another. For example, the mentally ill can be thought of as a Protected minority on the premise that they need special help and protection. On the other hand, they may also be perceived as a threat to others and so fall into the Combatted category. Women, who historically have been perceived as the weaker sex, initially would be of the Protected type similar to children. The cause of much continued discrimination, however, would appear to be to retain male advantage, and hence they presently more accurately fall in the Exploited category.

Animals clearly could be placed in all three categories. Some animals need protection, some animals are dangerous or destructive and some animals play an essential role in our economy.

The crucial element of justice, of course, is to insure that efforts to protect and help those groups in need of it do not become a self-serving tyranny; or that efforts to defend against the dangerous or destructive are not vindictive. On the other hand, benefits which accrue to the custodians in the care and treatment of Protected and Combatted groups do not necessarily constitute exploitation, so long as the rationale is not merely fabricated to justify such benefit. Is not the relationship between some pets and pet owners one of mutual benefit and not one of exploitation (although, of course, it could be)?

It strikes me as unrealistic as well as counterproductive to the welfare of animals to foster animal liberation. This is a cruelty we certainly would not impose on our children, the mentally ill, or other groups in need of protection.

For better or worse, the fact is we have created a world in which the vast majority of animals cannot make it on their own. They need our protection which requires our subjugation of them as well as a great deal of effort and expense on our part. A crucial question, however, is, "Do we have a right to expect something in return?" It would be hypocritical, of course, to argue that factory farming as presently practiced is anything more than simple exploitation. On the other hand, death is a price we all must pay for living. I take moral responsibility for the humane slaughter of two cows a year. These cows receive my daily attention for fifteen months, rain or shine, hot or cold. They could not make it on their own. In the end, their flesh on my table costs me more in actual dollars than meat bought in the store. But economy is not the purpose; rather some balance which converts an exploitative relationship into one of mutual beneficence.

I find it much more difficult to make any such argument for the justification of animal experimentation. It seems to me that any animal/human relationship must strike some sort of balance of mutual benefits—benefits to the animals as a result of the efforts of the custodian weighed against benefits to the custodian. Experimentation typically goes far beyond the custodial care required by the animal; hence, the experimenter exercises more than mere protective custody. The animal is a means to an end in a clearly exploitative relationship, unless the experiment is in some way required by or beneficial to the animal itself.

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