

Reply to Edward Ludwig

I have found the ideas expressed in Edward Ludwig's letter, "Animals as a Minority," and on animal rights and liberation (*Int J Stud Anim Prob* 2(6):280-281, 1981), very provocative.

His statement that it is unrealistic and counterproductive to promote animal liberation raises a question about whether Ludwig realizes that the animal rights/animal liberation movement seeks merely to free animals, since they are considered sentient beings, from being cruelly and greedily exploited for pleasure and/or financial gain, rather than cruelly exterminate them as pests whenever their interests conflict with human interests. Ludwig correctly states that in this man-made world, animals are in need of our protection (versus "subjugation," which is a debatable concept), and that their protection requires a great deal of effort and expense. But so does our protection of the rights of the human members of "the protected" and "the combatted" minority groups. We spend vast sums on protecting the rights of criminals (at the expense, too often, of the rights of their victims, actual and potential). Surely we are equally responsible for the protection of the rights of the innocent and voiceless animals that we are breeding or displacing or exploiting.

Ludwig errs, I think, in considering the matter of benefits that may accrue to custodians. These seem to me irrelevant to the moral issue. The best criterion for distinguishing right from wrong is, I believe, the entirely objective one given by Tom Regan: Does the destructive act prevent a greater evil? If not, it is morally indefensible. Even this principle puts a tremendous burden on the protectors of the rights of minorities, human and non-human. There must be no question of introducing the idea of accrued benefits to the custodians to complicate and confuse the real issue.

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