

Norm Phelps, *The Longest Struggle: Animal Advocacy from Pythagoras to PETA*
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Reviewed by Steven Best

“All of human history is one long horror story of the imprisonment, enslavement, torture, and murder of animals. Even countries whose culture has been shaped by religions that are more animal friendly than Christianity, like Hinduism and Buddhism, have a terrible record where animals are concerned.” Norm Phelps.¹

Recently, there have been a number of excellent histories of the animal advocacy and/or vegetarianism movement that have filled significant gaps in knowledge, provided critical narratives to the stories told by those less-than-sympathetic or even hostile to these movements, and in cases such as Tristram Stuart’s epic, *The Bloodless Revolution: A Cultural History of Vegetarianism from 1600 to Modern Times* (2007), have provided new perspectives from the animal and vegetarian standpoints that represent an important rethinking and revision of standard humanist histories – as Stuart, for example, shows how key figures of the French Revolution had linked egalitarianism and vegetarianism in a radical holistic politics.²

Along with Diane Beers’ recent work, *The Prevention of Cruelty* (2006), Norm Phelps’ new book, *The Longest Struggle: Animal Advocacy from Pythagoras to PETA*, is an important history of the modern animal advocacy movement. Whereas Beers’ book is largely a descriptive history, Phelps takes off the objectivist gloves to write a narrative that advocates the animal rights agenda. This is certainly a valid move, but -- like Lee Hall’s execrable Stockholm-Syndrome-suffering attack on militant animal liberation in her self-published screed, *Capers in the Courtyard* (2007) -- Phelps advances an arbitrary and circumscribed notion of animal rights that quintessentially embodies the bourgeois, liberal, reformist, single-issue, state-based, legalist politics that *dominate* the thinking and tactics of the contemporary animal advocacy movement, whether welfarist, “new welfarist,” or rights/abolitionist in theory and tactics.

Obediently, this approach eschews actions not pre-approved by the corporate-state complex and appropriates their hegemonic language to demonize those in the movement who chose tough direct action tactics and frequently stop animal exploiters where other more “civil” approaches necessarily fail. Despite the fanfare of Gary Francione and followers who tout their abolitionist approach as radically different from welfarism, whether “old” or “new,” the kissing-cousins welfare/rights/abolitions orientations are *more similar to than different from* one another. One sees this in the shared vilification of militant direct action (e. g., Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty [SHAC] and the Animal Liberation Front [ALF]) and the uncritical belief that justice for animals can come from corporate-controlled capitalism, which begs the question whether the abolition of animal exploitation is possible without abolishing the omniscidal capitalist system itself.

Phelps’ fixation on reformist and legal strategies as the best or only path to animal liberation mires him in blatant inconsistencies and contradictions that betray conceptual foundations rooted in capitalist ideology and the psychological need structure of Christian/Gandhian dogma. Although these flaws seriously detract from the

philosophical and political merit of the book, there is nonetheless much to gain from reading Phelps's comprehensive historical account of Western views toward animals.

A Tale of Two Traditions

Phelps constructs a broad historical narrative that makes new and important sense of Western history from the perspective of animal advocacy and vegetarianism. By working from the animal and vegetarian standpoints, Phelps uncovers aspects of Western history that are as crucial to understand as they are systematically ignored. These standpoints shed invaluable light on the social and ecological crises of Western societies, the moral character of societies and individuals, and the deeply flawed attempts to a progressivist narrative of history from humanist principles that discount the effects of social development on animals and the earth as a whole. As typically conceived in its patently racist and Eurocentric form, this metanarrative charts the evolutionary movement from an early "savage" or "primitive" stage of culture to an advanced level of "civilization," such as culminates in the economic, scientific, and technological development of Western modernity.

Phelps's dialectical rendering of Western history avoids the error of positing a hegemonic anthropocentrism that ruled uncontested from antiquity to modernity. Instead, he constructs a *dual narrative* that describes the dynamic coevolution of a speciesist and carnivorist tradition with an egalitarian and anti-carnivorist tradition, each vying for supremacy but the latter ultimately overwhelmed by the former.

On Phelps's narrative, the speciesist philosophy asserting human supremacy and God-like dominance over animals began with Aristotle's rejection of Pythagoras, perhaps the first Western proponent of vegetarianism and duties to animals, whose influence continued throughout Greek and Roman antiquity and was revived in modern times. In Aristotle's teleological view of the universe, the purpose of "lower" and "less perfect" forms of life is to serve the purposes of "higher" and "more perfect" beings. Aristotle's influence grew considerably to become an ideological foundation of Greco-Roman culture, Christianity, and the medieval era, waning only with the emergence of the modern science and empiricism in the seventeenth century. Whereas some theorists root anthropocentrism in the Judeo-Christian tradition and read Western history as influenced solely by the domination of nature ideology, Phelps argues that a significant counter-valuation emerged in the Judaic tradition in the form of a "Biblical Ethic" that inaugurated the Western welfarist tradition that counseled humans must show "kindness" and cause no undue harm to the animals they exploit. Stepping into controversial waters, Phelps claims that Jesus was a vegetarian and spiritual leader who had great compassion for animal suffering, such as he displayed by overturning the tables of moneychangers at the site of animal sacrifices. Thus, Phelps reads Jesus as the first animal liberationist.

If Christ was a liberationist and vegetarian – and Phelps more asserts than supports this -- the speciesist and hierarchical mentalities of institutionalized Christianity stem not from the founder himself, but rather from a tendentious follower who, as Saul, rejected Christ as Savior until a religious epiphany transformed him into a devout believer reborn as Paul. Ignoring the welfare ethics of Judaism and the liberationist politics of Jesus, Paul's influential revision of Christian teaching drew instead from the hierarchical outlook of Greek philosophy. From this corrupt hermeneutical position, Paul

denied that humans have moral obligations to animals. This deplorable viewpoint was affirmed and elaborated by medieval theologians Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, and became official Church doctrine that animal exploiters and carnivores to this day cite to justify their arrogance and violence against animals.

Although Christianity abolished the pagan rituals of animal sacrifice and the atrocities of the Roman Coliseum, it helped legitimate and spread countless other forms of animal exploitation. While crucial in dismantling Christian rule, secular modernity, as developed through the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, and modern science, seemed to bear promise for a rational ethic of animal protection shorn of superstition and theology. Yet, aside from the progressive views of Leonardo da Vinci and occasional sympathetic remarks from figures such as Montaigne and Voltaire, Phelps maintains that modern cultures sought progress for humans only while ignoring the plight of animals. Indeed, beginning especially in the seventeenth century with the emergence of modern vivisection, this allegedly “enlightened” world proved itself more barbarous than any past culture as it reduced animals to nonsentient machines and tortured them mercilessly without anesthetic. The steady growth in vivisection meant a hellish suffering and death for millions of animals. Further scientific and technological advances in the twentieth century led to the industrialization of animal farming through factory farms and slaughterhouses, as well as to genetic engineering and cloning which even more invasive manipulation of animals’ bodies.

Western cultural views toward animals cannot be reduced, however, to the hierarchical model, for always competing alongside speciesism was an egalitarian model advanced by progressive thinkers who urged compassion toward animals and, in many cases, vegetarianism. Some twenty five centuries ago, the egalitarian philosophy emerged in Western culture through the influence of Eastern philosophies of Jainism, Hinduism, and Buddhism, all of which promoted compassion for all sentient beings as their key ethical principle. Eastern influences first migrated into Western culture through Pythagoras, were perpetuated by neo-Platonists such as Plotinus and Porphyry, and they helped form animal protectionist views that continued into the modern period with figures such as Leonard da Vinci, John Calvin, Jeremy Bentham, Percy Shelley, Mary Shelly, William Blake, Arthur Schopenhauer, Henry Berg, Catherine Earl White, Henry Salt, Albert Schweitzer, Peter Singer, and Tom Regan.

Ironically enough, the animal protectionist ethic that emerged in the eighteenth century stemmed not from the “advanced” forces of science, but rather in large part from the “backward” thinking of the Protestant clergy who brought the Judaic ethic into the modern context. Also crucial were English philosophers, especially Jeremy Bentham, whose utilitarian ethics shattered the walls of rationalism and opened the moral community to all sentient beings.

The moral paradigm shift paved the way for the animal protection *movement*, a large, organized group of people dedicated to one general cause, such as emerged for the first time in history in the early nineteenth century. Animal protection became a social movement, not just an ethic or philosophy, in June 1824 with the emergence of the SPCA (later named the RSPCA with the blessings of Queen Victoria). This inspired Henry Bergh and others activists in the US to develop the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty toward Animals (ASPCA), and subsequently welfare organizations mushroomed throughout the nation. These groups had deep roots in upper class society

and typically promoted policies directed at working class (e.g., bear baiting) rather than upper class (e.g., fox hunting) cruelties. At the same time, Phelps notes, more radical organizations, typically led by women, emerged that wanted not just to reform vivisection but to ban it altogether. Nineteenth century anti-cruelty groups were successful in banning a number of barbarities such as baiting and animal fighting and they developed their own police or monitoring body to enforce the laws and prosecute violators.

Apart from radical anti-vivisectionists, however, welfare approaches to animal advocacy prevailed until the late 1970s. Important influences on the shift from reforming animal suffering to abolishing animal exploitation altogether, Phelps argues, included the American Vegan Society, the National Anti-Vivisection Society, the hunt-sabotage tactics that arose in England in the 1950s, and “transitional groups” such as the “Oxford group” of philosophers. Out of his involvement with this group and his review of an anthology on animal ethics, Peter Singer came to writing his highly influential book, *Animal Liberation* (1975). Despite a title that obscures a welfarist orientation, Phelps emphasizes that Singer’s book changed the lives of countless people and thereby was crucial for developing the large current of change that fed into the animal *rights* movement. According to Phelps, this movement was galvanized in the early 1980s by the first national animal right conferences, it was advanced by Henry Spira’s protests, and was developed in explicit philosophical form with Tom Regan’s *The Case for Animal Rights* (1986).

Since the 1950s, however, a more militant and authentic liberationist approach was active in UK hunt-sab groups. These groups inspired the formation of the Band of Mercy in 1972, which escalated sabotage tactics by using arson and attacking vivisection laboratories, and in 1976 influenced Ronnie Lee to create the Animal Liberation Front, an underground group dedicated to freeing animals from cages and employing economic sabotage against vivisectors, fur farmers, and other animal exploiters. By the early 1980s, the ALF had spread throughout the US and beyond, becoming a global movement that is now active in over twenty countries. In 1999, one more important movement emerged out of the direct action culture of England, namely, Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty which was devoted solely to shutting down one of the world’s largest and most egregious animal testing companies, Huntingdon Life Sciences (HLS). In 2002, SHAC cells grew through the US and other countries and its high-pressure tactics against HLS earned it notoriety, state crackdown, prison sentences for leading members, and captious criticism from the mainstream animal advocacy movement including the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) and, as I will show, Phelps himself.

A Critical Accounting

In *The Longest Struggle: Animal Advocacy from Pythagoras to PETA*, Phelps provides a lucid account of a complex history that leaves the reader with a clear sense of competing tendencies, such as between hierarchical and egalitarian traditions, as well as among welfare, rights, and direct action/liberation approaches. Adroitly, Phelps avoids the dangers of constructing a linear narrative, such as would result from a stage-theory of history that traced an alleged movement of increasing radicalism that unfolds in the transition from welfare to rights and liberation. He shows, for instance, how ancient Eastern cultures and early (pre-Socratic) Western cultures had more progressive views

toward animals than subsequent Western societies, and he reveals how the much vaunted modern sciences and technologies, compared to the “Dark Ages” of medievalism, were utterly regressive from the standpoint of animals. Phelps separates what constitutes progress for humans and for animals, and “progress” typically involves a zero-sum game in which humans advance at the expense of the animals they enslave. Indeed, throughout Phelps’s book, there is a stirring emphasis on “human tyranny” rooted in the enslavement of animals. The book is a strong – and much deserved – indictment of the pretentiousness and hypocrisy of Western “civilization.”

Against a linear narrative that plots the gradual build-up toward radical ideas, Phelps argues that an egalitarian, respectful and non-exploitative animal ethic, something which approximated or provided foundational ideas for the modern concert of “animal rights,” first emerged in the axial age (800-200 BCE), and animal welfare “was a compromised worked out by society between unregulated animal abuse and the demand that animal exploitation be ended. (xvii).³ Liberationist approaches emerged first within the anti-vivisection movement of the 19th century, not out of some conceptual *Aufhebung* in the antinomy between welfare and rights, but by forging a more militant, alternative form of theory, politics, and tactics that was revitalized in the mid-1970s.

Phelps does not chronicle events as if history were always smooth and continuous, but rather identifies key discontinuities and turning points that led to profound changes in the way Western societies viewed animals, the world, and themselves. These include: the pernicious influence of Aristotle who grounded contingent social hierarchies in the natural order of things; the Christian rejection of Jewish codes to treat animals with kindness and mercy, thereby changing the stewardship ethic of “dominion” to the martinet mindset of domination; Paul’s corrupt revision of the Biblical tradition and Jesus’ true teachings that provided the foundations for an orthodox Christianity that negated everything Christ fought and died for; Jeremy Bentham’s utilitarian ethics that carried profound egalitarian implications by grounding moral status in sentience rather than human rationality; and the nineteenth century turn toward animal protectionism as a social movement rather than a moral ideal. One other important consequence of Phelps’s dual narrative approach is to show that speciesism is not necessarily inherent in or necessary to human nature, and that people can relate to animals in compassion, loving ways, as equals rather than inferiors – although there is plenty of room in human history to find violent proclivities and to doubt this.

There is an unfortunate, widespread propensity in the animal advocacy and vegetarian communities, however, whereby people uphold notable historical figures as one of their own when, in fact, the affiliations of these icons to animal and/or vegetarian ideals were often less than ingenuous or clear. To work through the dogma and confusion in a clear manner, Phelps draws a useful distinction between true (intrinsic) and false (extrinsic) motivations for historical notables thought to advocate animal ethics and/or vegetarianism. On Phelps’s reading, for instance, Plato’s promotion of vegetarianism is a false endorsement because he saw it as a stoic virtue that could thwart the injury of indulgence in rich foods such as meat. Plato advocated vegetarianism as a way to reduce harm to humans, not to promote the well-being of animals, to avoid the vice of bad foods rather than to embrace a vegetarian diet as a virtue in its own right. Phelps similarly removes the halo from another idol, St. Francis of Assisi. While animal people love Assisi because of his alleged spiritual democracy that included animals and his fabled

powers to communicate with animals, Phelps argues that Assisi in fact had little regard for animals and spoke to them only to win their obedience. Similarly, Rousseau, the much-touted seminal influence on modern vegetarianism, was not a vegetarian or animal advocate in any significant way. By way of example, Phelps describes the scenario in Rousseau's classic novel, *Emile*, in which Rousseau promotes hunting animals to purge the alleged damaging sex drive in youth. Yet, unlike his contemporaries, Rousseau was influential in his insistence that humans owe animals kindness and respect on the grounds that animals are sentient, whereas considerations of their rationality were irrelevant, and for emphasizing the importance of sympathy for healthy moral faculties. Other pseudo-champions of the animals include Benjamin Franklin and Richard Martin who condemned animal cruelty less for the animals' sake than for the benefit of the poor whose morals they sought to reform by instilling greater compassion for others. Examples abound.

Conversely, Phelps points out that even if a figure truly embraces animal issues, he or she may nonetheless be morally problematic and culpable by holding regressive views toward humans. A case in point is nineteenth century German philosopher, Arthur Schopenhauer, who defended the interests of animals through a Buddhist standpoint that embraced a universal ethic of compassion, as he also demeaned women and espoused racist views. It is short-sighted and problematic, therefore, to uphold such figures as progressive paradigms of morality, as racists, sexists, homophobes, fascists, and others flaunt the egalitarian and anti-hierarchical philosophy of animal advocates. It is crucial to qualify Phelps's instructive critique of alleged voices for animals, however, by emphasizing that – properly formulated and understood – animal rights is not a reactionary, anti-human, or fascist ideology, but rather a logical and necessary consequences of the universalization of rights and broadening of the moral community in the modern era, and that animal liberation is as central to human liberation as human liberation is vital to it.⁴

While Phelps successfully relates the broad outlines of complex developments within Western culture, his narrative often is clumsy and jagged, as when he leaps forward in time to relate how a concept developed and then returns to a fractured narrative. Also, Phelps tends to lapse into idealist analysis that focuses on the development of ideas apart from a broader social context, and he emphasizes the influence of religion on the modern animal advocacy movement as if it were an autonomous conceptual system isolated from the complexities of modernity and capitalism. While he sometimes discusses how the nineteenth century animal movement emerged as part of a overall movement for social reform that included anti-slavery and suffragette struggles, he fails to give enough emphasis to the broader political context of these developments, such as how they relate to modernization, urbanization, industrialization, and the commodification and enslavement of animals as the result as the inherent logic of a grow-or-die capitalist system. While demonstrating that key advances in the modern animal advocacy movement came from England, Phelps never explains why this occurred and what socio-economic and cultural conditions might have prompted England's leading role. It is an odd and significant lapse, moreover, that he doesn't engage the environmental and social justice aspects of vegetarianism as they become increasingly apparent in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and were explicitly

developed as least by 1971, with the publication of Francis Moore Lappe's *Diet for a Small Planet*.

Phelps and the Political Vacuum of Animal Rights

The social, political, and economic lacunae of Phelps's analysis are no doubt related to his overall political views, which are reformist, pro-capitalist, and single-issue oriented. Phelps's politics are muted in *The Longest Struggle*, but emerge more substantively in his 2007 interview *Abolitionist Online*. Here he muses on the proper relation between animal rights and human rights, between tactics appropriate to liberating animals and more radical strategies necessary for a larger social transformation that can dismantle forms of human oppression as well:

I think it would be a grave strategic error to tie animal liberation to the abolition of capitalism or any other more general restructuring of society. First, there are real and important gains for animals that can be made within the current social and economic structure, however unsatisfactory that structure may be on other grounds. To forego those gains by focusing on patriarchy and capitalism as opposed to focusing directly on animal oppression would, in effect, be condemning countless generations of animals to lifelong suffering and early death, at least some of which could have been alleviated.

Secondly, tying animal rights to a radical political agenda dealing with human issues, like socialism or anarchism, would convince the general public that animal advocates are a bunch of dangerous loony tunes, and set the animals' cause back to where it was before Peter Singer wrote *Animal Liberation*. Animal rights is a hard enough sell without linking it to another cause that the overwhelming majority of the public is adamantly opposed to. The task of the animal rights movement is to persuade Middle America that animals are not ours to eat, wear, experiment on, or use in entertainment, and that animals are entitled to live their lives according to the dictates of their natures with as little interference from human beings as possible. We need to stay focused on that agenda.

Third, whenever animal issues are tied to human issues, the animals always come out losers because when the crunch comes, the human issues are given priority. When the human issue appears to come into conflict with the animals' issue, the animals are abandoned. Something similar happened in the nineteenth century when abolitionists abandoned women's suffrage. Up to and through the Civil War, the abolition and women's movements had proceeded together. They had overlapping leadership, and advocates of one were typically advocates of the other. But during reconstruction, when a Constitutional Amendment was being drafted that would give former slaves the vote, feminists wanted female former slaves to be given the vote along with males. Afraid that this might endanger the amendment, abolitionists deserted women and opted for male-only suffrage. It was more than a half century before women of any color got the vote nationwide.⁵

Lest one get the false impression that Phelps dismisses all causes but animal rights, he adds this qualification: "I am not for a moment suggesting that animal advocates should not also be outspoken feminists, socialists, anarchists, or advocates for whatever other causes they believe in. I am only saying that the animal rights movement as a movement needs to maintain its independence and keep its focus on the animals."⁶ Phelps does make a sound point – as I myself have often underscored --- that radical Left traditions are replete with dogmatic humanists and speciesists who are blind to the moral, social, and environmental importance of animal rights and vegetarianism.⁷ With their oppressors' mentality, stunted moral philosophy, and fragmented political vision, Left humanists cannot grasp the fact that animal liberation and human liberation are interdependent. Thus, there is in fact a problem with tying the rope of animal liberation to the wagon of human liberation; in most cases Leftists, humanists, and "social revolutionaries" are themselves animal oppressors who do not want to abandon their "privileges" and who want to marginalize animal issues to the last priority of far "more important" goals such as reducing the work week, ending the US Invasion of Iraq, and advancing human rights and human equality.

In cases where animal liberationists join in alliance politics and coalitions against war, militarism, imperialism, global warming, and other important causes, the voice of the animals must never be drowned out by prevailing human interests that seek to emancipate humans first, with the promise to bring along animals later (no doubt with the aid of a welfarist ethic). Animal and human liberation projects work together, or not at all. Phelps's single-issue politics transforms the *relative autonomy* of animal issues into a *radical autonomy* that separates animal liberation from its larger social, political, and economic context. Phelps' atomistic, single-issue, two-party, liberal vision thwarts any effort to forge alliance movements against issues such as war, rainforest destruction, poverty, and world hunger that affect humans and animals alike. Like Francione, Hall, and other "abolitionists," Phelps uncritically accepts capitalism as the political-economic structure that can carry us indefinitely into an ever-brighter and more prosperous future, one where animals – the primary slaves of the present day crucial to the operations of global capitalism – will ultimately be free, if not completely then at least from severe forms of cruelty and suffering.

Phelps and other reformists do not take notice that the grow-or-die logic of capitalism propels its globalizing market-system juggernaut toward ever more rapid, radical, and unsustainable forms of production and consumption, wreaking environmental havoc throughout the planet; they seem unaware that the state ultimately is the political and legal arm of powerful corporations and lobbying groups, very much including the powerful animal exploiters in the food industry, pharmaceutical companies, science and research sector, and so on. These reformist-liberal arguments, mind you, are advanced without embarrassment in the dark reign of the Bush-Cheney Reich that attacked the separation of powers to nullify Congress and the courts, waged illicit wars on behalf of military contract and big oil interests, spread fear based on phony terrorist threats in order to bulldoze Constitutional rights with the tank of the USA PATRIOT Act, enclosed the nation within a total surveillance system, tortured "terrorist" suspects through "secret rendition" powers and clandestine CIA operations, and has brought this country more dangerously close to genuine fascism than ever before in its history. While the most corrupt and anti-democratic administration in US political history, the Bush-Cheney

administration nonetheless exemplifies the corporate cooptation of the state that poses difficult if not insuperable obstacles for strictly legal approaches toward winning any significant rights for animals that threaten the profits of the corporate slavemasters. But these matters go unmentioned by the reformist-legalist crowd.

Phelps says little about social movements and political change in order to focus on individual initiatives and spiritual change. He thus stands alongside other liberals who make their peace with the status quo, condemn anyone whose disobedience is not (as only decorous bourgeois functionaries can conceive it) “civil,” and hold out for crumbs of legislative change and welfare reforms that now and then fall from the Masters’ tables. But if the worldwide animal liberation movement is to become anything more than an explicitly reformist lobby that begs elites for reforms to alleviate the pain of caged animals -- so long, of course, as all this is compatible with economic growth and unlimited expansionary and developmental projects -- all these issues must be brought together in an all-encompassing liberatory project that challenges the profit and growth imperatives of global capitalism. But one is pressed to find a scintilla of awareness of these issues in the liberal animal rights and reformist abolitionist crowd of today.

One could argue that animal liberation makes its strongest contributions to the extent that it rejects single-issue politics and becomes part -- an integral, vital and dynamic -- of a broader anti-capitalist movement. This is certainly not the present case for the overall animal advocacy movement, which might be viewed as a kind of “popular front” organization that seeks unity around basic values on which people from all political orientations -- from apolitical, conservative, and liberal persuasions to radical anarchists -- could agree. “But, to my mind,” argues anarchist theorist Takis Fotopolous, “this is exactly the animal movement’s fundamental weakness which might make the development of [a systemic anti-capitalist] consciousness out of a philosophy of ‘rights,’ etc. almost impossible.”⁸

Bourgeois Pride and Prejudice

As every history and narrative is partial and motivated, Phelps’s biases are clear. The book is heavily skewed toward a dogmatic embrace of peaceful, legal, “non-violent” forms of advocacy that have severe limitations. If such tactics were employed exclusively throughout the political battles for human rights during the last three centuries, this approach would have left many people still in chains and prisons. Without argument or cause, and sounding more like the reactionary corporate front group, the Center for Consumer Freedom (CCF) than a champion of animal rights, Phelps smears the ALF and SHAC as “reprehensible” (274) groups engaged in nothing but “mischief-making” (276). Not content with this grotesque simplification of their theory and politics and distortion of their significance and accomplishments -- the thousands of animals their militant tactics have freed, the scores of exploiters they have put out of business, and the countless more potential future speciesists they forced to rethink their career choice -- Phelps can only hurl the clichéd hysterical charge that direct action militants are “giving the animals’ enemies a weapon with which to destroy the entire animal rights movement” (276). It is precisely this line of thinking that motivates the top brass of HSUS to assail and demonize militant direct action. In one grotesque, McCarthyesque incident, HSUS executive Mike Markarian stated in the media that HSUS “applauds” the FBI witchhunt

against “eco-terrorists” and hopes that they “go after” the radicals.⁹ In 2007, the FBI followed HSUS’ suggestion and arrested seven SHAC activists -- 6 of whom sit in jail as I write – for the crime of running a website and an effective campaign against an unconscionable corporation that tortures and kills 500 animals a day.

Phelps constantly criticizes the “species cant” that advanced thinkers like Bentham evinced in their inconsistent views on animals, such as defending their interests as sentient beings while also denigrating them in commonplace fashion for their alleged lack of reason or cognitive complexity. Yet, in the same way, Phelps advances strong insights and yet swallows the official party line against direct action peddled by corporate exploiters, state bureaucrats, the FBI, the CCF, the Southern Poverty Law Center, and the HSUS Gestapo. Phelps carps against militant direction today *in the same way that in the 1960s the NAACP chastised Martin Luther King Jr. as an “extremist” and urged he abandon his civil disobedience tactics and patiently “wait” for change.*¹⁰

But Phelps is *not even consistent* in his critique of direct action. He provides a glowing account of Jesus’ sabotage-tactic of overturning the tables of the money-changers working on behalf of the animal sacrifice market. He extols Jesus as the “first animal liberator” (50) and praises his aggression as “history’s first direct action to liberate animals” (50). Phelps also affirms numerous medieval saints who protected animals from hunters and thus “were the first hunt saboteurs, releasing animals from snares and placing their own bodies between the hunters and their prey” (55). He even appears, like Peter Singer in *Animal Liberation*, to commend some ALF actions, such as the 1984 raid on the University of Pennsylvania head injury clinic which produced important video documentation of animal abuse and, with the publicity assistance of PETA (which played the role of the ALF press office in the 1980s), provoked a national outrage and closed the torture chambers down.¹¹

So Jesus is a liberationist, and his activist progeny in the ALF are punks, misfits, and dangers to the mainstream. This is a blatant contradiction. While Jesus opened up the cages that confined sacrificial animals and turned over the tables of the moneychangers, Phelps incomprehensibly condemns contemporary versions of Jesus’ acts as “violence.” Of course, typical of contemporary animal rights pacifists, Phelps never defines “violence” and so the argument is vacuous and merely rhetorical. It seems Phelps will even at some points support effective illegal raids on laboratories, but he stops at the point of economic sabotage and arson – but why, if both are in truth effective and needed tactics in *the long and broad war against animal exploiters?*

Like HSUS and much of the mainstream animal movement, Phelps uncritically accepts FBI, state, and corporate definitions of violence and terrorism which are then replicated in the critique of direct action, thereby condemning some of the most effective actions taken in the movement as “criminal” and “counter-productive.” Compounding the schizophrenic effect, Phelps attacks SHAC and the ALF but is entirely uncritical of Paul Watson’s own sabotage tactics, whether these involve sinking fishing vessels in a harbor, ramming pirate whalers to thwart their intent to murder whales, or ripping open a hole in the side of a whaler’s ship to disable it from its despicable task. I am certainly not criticizing Watson’s work, which I greatly admire, but rather pointing to another inconsistency whereby Phelps praises one form of property destruction but condemns another. Seemingly, Phelps is oscillating between two identities: a Dr. Jekyll who places trust in a death-dealing machinations of the corporate-state complex and the loving power

of *satyagraha* (Gandhi's "soul force"), and a Mr. Hyde who champions lawbreaking and sabotage of they advance the cause of animal liberation.

In another curious move, Phelps treats PETA with kid gloves despite their endless follies and demented policy of "euthanizing" thousands of cats and dogs, many perfectly adoptable. Needless to say, HSUS and other mainstream groups that have become part of the Beltway machinery are extolled effusively. Their path is portrayed as the *one and only* road forward, through the labyrinthine system of money and favors where citizen voices are drowned out by the cacophony of armies of lobbyists wielding bags of cash and exotic travel bookings. In corporate capitalism we trust.

Phelps blames militant direct action groups for driving a wedge within the movement, while ignoring the far more sectarian and divisive actions of groups such as the HSUS that leveled public critiques against the ALF and SHAC, that encourage the FBI to violate First Amendment rights to free speech, that cut and run from national conferences that allow a small handful of militant to speak, and that create their own conference settings that pander to the welfare crown and invite leaders of the meat industry to present their contemptible rationalizations of the mass murder of innocents.

So who really is driving a wedge into the animal protection movement? It is ironic that as Phelps levels misinformed accusations against direct action groups, he himself emerges as a factionist and divisive force. The truth is that the real wedge drivers are the mainstream welfare movements like HSUS and their supporters such as Phelps. I have never known anyone in the militant direct action camp to dogmatically insist that their approach is the one and only true one, and to not acknowledge the importance of many mainstream programs and actions. I also have never seen humility or understanding coming from mainstream figures in their view of direct action, as they and their organizations are fearful of serious struggle, of stepping outside their corporate-state imposed box, and of admitting that there are many effective ways of bringing about animal liberation. Phelps is flat wrong in his straw-man critique of the direct action advocates thinking that "violence" is the solution, as typically the radicals of the ALF, SHAC, and other groups advocate – and in their daily lives enact -- a wide range of tactics that are necessary and helpful, including animal rescue and sanctuaries, public education, and vegan outreach.

Phelps represents yet another example of the inability of the mainstream movement to seriously engage direct action in its philosophical complexity and political efficacy. Instead, the pacifists of the mainstream rely on tired slogans and dogmas, dog-eared books of Gandhi and King, utopian concepts of human nature, and naïve views of the Machiavellian and nihilistic nature of the corporate-state complex and an ecocidal juggernaut of global capitalism that might just take us all down before we can bring about anything resembling animal rights. They typically see history only in pacifist terms, and thus uphold Gandhi and King as examples of the efficacy of non-violence, never mentioning the more militant and sometimes violent opposition forces also contributing factors to social change in India, the US, and elsewhere. Moreover, they tend to be ignorant of the history of social movements and the crucial role violence, force, and intimidation have played in bringing about progressive social and moral change. The corrective to wholesale consumption of Gandhi and King can be found in books such as Howard Zinn's, *A Peoples History of the United States* (which throughout emphasizes the

crucial role sabotage and violence play in struggles for democracy); Ward Churchill's, *The Pathology of Pacifism*; and Peter Gelderloos's *How Nonviolence Protects the State*.

If Phelps had not intruded simplistically and inconsistently into complex political debates, in order to score some rhetorical points and win favors from the mainstream potentates and disciples, his book would have been stronger and more satisfying. With the reader advised along these lines, *The Longest Struggle* nonetheless is valuable for uncovering the long, jagged, and varied history of animal advocacy and how egalitarian and vegetarian viewpoints thrived side-by-side with the dominant speciesist and carnivorous ideologies of Western societies. For a fuller social, political, and economic contextualization and interpretation of the history, nature, and significance of animal liberation, one must turn to other works, including those important volumes yet to be written.

¹ "The Dominion of Love: Animal Rights According to the Bible," Norm Phelps interviewed by Claudette Vaughan, *Abolitionist Online*, Issue 6, May 2007 (http://www.abolitionist-online.com/_06phelps.html).

² On standpoint theory, see my review of Charles Patterson's book, *Eternal Treblinka*, in this issue, and also my forthcoming book, *Animal Liberation and Moral Progress: The Struggle for Future Evolution* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2008).

³ It is important here to emphasize the discourse of rights, and animal rights in particular, are modern concepts that arose in the distinct social conditions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and thus one should not read these back throughout history and into Pythagoras and ancient Eastern religions. From our current perspective, we can see the ancient emphasis on compassion and ahimsa, and the egalitarianism and anti-cruelty ethics of Pythagoras as key inspirations for the modern notion of rights, although of course the ancients did not use the discourse of rights and lived within a very different social context.

⁴ For a more detailed elaboration of the argument that animal and human liberation are inseparably related, see Steven Best "Rethinking Revolution: Animal Liberation, Human Liberation, and the Future of the Left," *The International Journal of Inclusive Democracy*, Issue #6, June 2006 (http://www.inclusivedemocracy.org/journal/is6/Best_rethinking_revolution.htm), and Steven Best, "The Killing Fields of South Africa: Eco Wars, Species Apartheid, and Total Liberation," *Fast Capitalism*, Issue 2, Volume 2, 2007 (http://www.uta.edu/huma/agger/fastcapitalism/2_2/home.html).

⁵ "The Dominion of Love: Animal Rights According to the Bible," Norm Phelps interviewed by Claudette Vaughan, *Abolitionist Online*, Issue 6, May 2007

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ See Best, "Rethinking Revolution: Animal Liberation, Human Liberation, and the Future of the Left."

⁸ Email correspondence with me, December 2006.

⁹ See Steven Best, "HSUS Crosses the Line," *North American Animal Liberation Press Office Newsletter*, Volume 1 Number 3, September 2005 (<http://www.animalliberationpressoffice.org/Newsletter/archives/sep2005/hsus.htm>).

¹⁰ See King's rebuttal to their self-serving conservatism in his classic 1963 essay in defense of direct action, "Letter from Birmingham Jail," widely anthologized or available online at sites such as: http://www.stanford.edu/group/King/popular_requests/frequentdocs/birmingham.pdf.

¹¹ Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation*. New York, Random House, pp. 80-81.