

Response to Katherine Perlo's "Extrinsic and Intrinsic Arguments: Strategies for Promoting Animal Rights," in *Journal for Critical Animal Studies* Vol. V, Issue 1, 2007

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I have been a vegan animal rights activist for about 20 years now, and while I believe the ethical or "intrinsic" case for animal rights is central, I do not disdain using secondary, pragmatic, or "extrinsic" appeals such as involve claims that carnivorousism is unhealthy, environmentally disastrous, a disservice to the poor, and may indirectly promote warfare (a point Perlo correctly attributes to Dr. Richard Schwartz), or that vivisection is incapable of producing real advances for human medicine. Perlo urges us to "stick to the subject" of animal rights, which is apparently what she means by the "intrinsic appeal." She makes a number of claims about extrinsic appeals regarding health, the environment, medical effectiveness, etc., which I think merit rebuttals both in the interests of thorough academic discussion, as well as developing sound forms of activism.

She states that animal rights campaigns are most effectively advanced through intrinsic appeals, which seems to concede some effectiveness to extrinsic appeals. Indeed, Dr. Perlo concedes that "extrinsic arguments have had some positive effect." (Perlo 2007, 1) She notes that "[e]xtrinsic points may have their place within an intrinsic framework, for example as reassurance that vegetarianism or (vivisection) abolitionism can promote better health or medicine, but if these points are not assigned a clearly subordinate role, they can distort the real argument, which is intrinsic and moral" (Perlo 2007, 2).

I agree with this statement, except it is not clear if the role of "reassurance" is only in response to people who wonder about these things and require an answer. I think animal rights campaigners should support, use, and defend all manner of arguments that encourage a better state for animals. Indeed, her conclusion seems to be stringent, implying that we should exclude extrinsic appeals from any prominent place in animal rights campaigning whatsoever, such as when she writes: "When animal rights arguments are based on extrinsic features, or even include them prominently as supplements, the results may be inconsistency, concession to speciesism, concealment of moral principles, unconscious double standards, ethical ambiguity, remoteness and uncertainty of projected outcomes, and the suggestion that animal-related considerations are not important enough to make the case on their own." (Perlo 2007, 12) This seems to confirm that "reassurances" are only incidental, that is, if people happen to ask.

On the positive side, I agree that when making a case for animal rights, extrinsic appeals are often irrelevant. I do not wish to say they are always irrelevant though. In my article, "A Living Will Clause for Supporters of Animal Experimentation," (Sztybel 2006) I try to invert the claim that we should not give up on vivisection because the benefits supposedly outweigh the harms. I suggest that vivisectionists should volunteer for vivisection if they ever become cognitively equivalent to nonhuman animals, say, through a brain injury, and that such research should even take a priority over research on

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nonhumans because it would be infinitely more effective. Of course I do not literally advocate the living will but merely show it to be an unwelcome corollary of the vivisectionist position. My living will argument depends on the empirical claim that vivisection on nonhumans very generally does not provide (nearly as much) medical knowledge about human beings.

However most of my own ethics writing and advocacy does not use extrinsic appeals. Of course, being rooted in appeals to the inherent worth of nonhuman sentient beings, animal rights *themselves* cannot be won by extrinsic appeals. Also, as Dr. Perlo implies, we need to get people thinking about the animals themselves, and not just perpetually promote self-centered ideas concerning the health benefits of veganism or the alleged benefits from vivisection. Some cynics I have met even wish to get away from speaking about veganism or animal rights at all, thinking these ideas are too much of a hard-sell for a largely egocentric public. I agree with Dr. Perlo that the main thrust of the animal rights movement should be ethics and duty-for-it's-own sake, but her suggestion goes well beyond this, calling for a *total exclusion* of extrinsic appeals even as prominent supplements.

In the following I paraphrase Perlo's dozen or so negative claims about extrinsic appeals and then seek to rebut each one:

1. *Extrinsic arguments tacitly consign animal rights to a marginal or extreme position.* (Perlo 2007, 1)

Rebuttal: This is not necessarily true. The ethical case can be asserted as primary while a full-spectrum approach offers other reasons against animal exploitation. Also, Perlo is perhaps too rigid in her separation of intrinsic and extrinsic appeals. She associates intrinsic appeals at times with considering animals as ends in themselves (Perlo 2007, 10), thereby proclaiming the moral equality of all species (Perlo 2007, 4). This approach is evident, for instance when she writes: "To hurt or kill animals is wrong, regardless of any other considerations" (Perlo 2007, 9). Should a mosquito's life be saved equally as a human's? Is it wrong to kill a bear in self-defense or to cause unavoidable suffering to animals at the veterinarians? Apart from these questions, which undermine Perlo's simplistic assertions about animal liberation, if extrinsic appeals result in *less killing of animals and also less animal suffering*, then, in fact, intrinsic concerns of animal rightists may *partly* be won by extrinsic appeals.

2. *Extrinsic appeals "disown" animal rights.* (Perlo 2007, 1)

Rebuttal : Again, this is not necessarily true.

3. *Extrinsic appeals make the public suspect an ulterior motive and the animal rights movement loses some credibility.* (Perlo 2007, 6)

Rebuttal: I think the public is smart enough to know that a group promoting animal rights may use numerous kinds of appeals to make things better for animals. The credibility loss would only be in the eyes of those who think that only intrinsic appeals are

legitimate—but that begs the question, since that is exactly what is at issue here.

4. *Relying on extrinsic appeals uses a double-standard in that we would never use them on behalf of humans, arguing, for example, that slavery is less healthy for slave owners.* (Perlo 2007, 6)

Rebuttal: It is absurd to speak of slavery as unhealthy for slave owners, except in terms of slavemasters working less and becoming obese. In any case these comparisons are not so easily analogous. Human rights appeals have a powerful effect by themselves, and are enough to change public policy, quite unlike animal rights appeals at this stage. With particularly harsh political regimes, economic sanctions—a kind of extrinsic appeal—are also appropriate, e.g., the worldwide campaign during the 1980s and 1990s to divest from South African enterprises supporting Apartheid. However, if there were aliens who ruthlessly used humans for food and experiments and were smug in their sense of entitlement to do so, then—in a more relevant analogy—it might indeed cause less suffering and death for humans to urge that eating humans is unhealthy, etc. I would use such a tactic among others. In that case there is no speciesist double-standard in using extrinsic appeals.

5. *The animals themselves do not care about extrinsic appeals such as relate to arguments that animal agriculture” is inefficient at producing protein or that vivisection is scientifically unsound.* (Perlo 2007, 7).

Rebuttal: This is irrelevant. Many animals may not care about PETA’s slogans, either, but these may be crucial in promoting the cause of animal rights. And animals do care about suffering less and being allowed to live, goals which extrinsic appeals may help by Dr. Perlo’s own admission.

6. *Extrinsic appeals such as involving health or the environment are not as immediate and certain as the fact that animals suffer and die in exploitation practices.* (Perlo 2007, 8)

Rebuttal: It is certain that meat-eating is unhealthy and a global environmental disaster, and that vivisection is largely unhelpful in predicting results for humans. I think the scientific cases have been made overwhelmingly in support of these claims even if some so-called “experts” still refuse to admit it. Remoteness is not necessarily a factor, since intrinsic appeals may also involve concerning oneself with animals whom one never sees, and whose lives may only indirectly be affected by, say, particular purchasing decisions. Even animals who may not exist due to boycotts are a consideration. It is hard to get more “remote” than that.

7. *The extrinsic appeal that vivisection does not work creates confusion because animals are asserted to be different so results for them cannot be extrapolated to humans, but ethical anti-vivisection relies on the claim that nonhuman animals are similar to humans. This involves “conflicting” claims* (Perlo 2007, 2).

Rebuttal: Animals are different from us physiologically so vivisection does not work, but they are similar to us in terms of sentience, which is crucial to the ethical case against vivisection. These are not conflicting claims. Also, the sentience similarity does not justify pain research since we restrict against such research performed on humans and I argue it would be speciesist to do otherwise with nonhuman animals. The fear of some confusion seems itself confused, or to attribute to the interlocutor a lack of critical thinking skills which may be condescending.

8. *Extrinsic appeals do not “stick to the subject,” and we cannot win the debate over animal rights “by talking about something else.”* (Perlo 2007, 12)

Rebuttal: Granted, animal rights ethics debates cannot be decided by extrinsic appeals alone. But no one claims otherwise. This does not show that it is not helpful to use such appeals as part of a larger discursive argument that we ought to treat animals as ends in themselves.

9. *Extrinsic appeals such as vegetarianism and anti-vivisection are separable from extrinsic appeals.* (Perlo 2007, 12).

Rebuttal: True, but irrelevant. The question is: is it best for animals that we leave out these arguments? I have argued against the thesis that it is best to omit extrinsic appeals from any prominence.

10. *Extrinsic appeals involve inconsistency or a concession to speciesism.* (Perlo 2007, 12)

Rebuttal: Activists who use extrinsic appeals may consistently denounce speciesism, but they recognize that much of their audience remains speciesist nonetheless, and therefore there is a rational, morally motivated, and in fact anti-prejudicial move to cause these speciesists to create less death and suffering for animals. The anti-speciesism here is realized primarily in terms of alleviating the harmful effects of the speciesism. It is not always possible to erase speciesprejudices themselves.

11. *Extrinsic appeals suggest that animal-related considerations are not important enough to make the case on their own.* (Perlo 2007, 12)

Rebuttal: Most appeals to extrinsic considerations do not involve any statements at all about whether ethical appeals are more important than health or other appeals. In any event, I would say that ethical appeals are supremely important, and may succeed on their own, and perhaps will succeed with anyone who is perfectly rational and good. But I am not so naïve as to say that such appeals will work with everyone -- hence the relevance of the extrinsic appeals which also have important effects. For example, about 80% of vegetarians make this lifestyle change for (selfish) health reasons, not for (altruistic) moral reasons, but their abstinence still spares many animals suffering and death. Ignoring such statistic when campaigning is unwise and not best for animals.

12. *Avoiding extrinsic appeals and embracing only intrinsic appeals is more “honest.”*

(Perlo 2007, 12)

Rebuttal: It may be dishonest to claim one is not concerned with animal rights when one really is when launching an extrinsic appeal. But I am not so dishonest, and the extrinsic appeals are rooted in truthful claims largely about how animal exploitation affects humans.

Perhaps what is at work in Perlo's thinking is a variety of animal rights fundamentalist assumptions. In "Animal Rights Law" (Szybel 2007) I critically discussed those who reject animal "welfarist" legislation partly because it is a departure from animal rights. Promoting the health benefits of vegetarianism can be seen as a similar departure from advocating animal rights. Anything contrary to animal rights, if the latter is conceived of as an ultimate principle, can be deemed morally wrong or inconsistent for any who profess to animal rights. In that earlier essay I argued that we should aim for actions that have positive significance. However, I believe that only sentient beings find anything to be of significance. Mindless things do not find anything to be positively, negatively, or even neutrally significant. Stones are thus beyond indifferent, but so are ideals, including "animal rights." In "The Rights of Animal Persons," (2006b) I therefore urge an animal rights ethic that is ultimately about doing what is best for each and every sentient being, in a distinctly nonutilitarian manner. We cannot do better than what is best. And we should promote animal rights for the sake of sentient beings, not treat sentient beings in a manner that is subordinate to furthering any ideal, including animal rights. So is show-casing illness as a consequence of meat-eating part of promoting animal rights? Not in the narrow sense perhaps. However, is such a form of activism consistent with promoting what is best for animals? I think the answer is clearly yes.

I thank Dr. Perlo for her thoughtful comments in the *Journal for Critical Animal Studies*, and again I think there is merit to her general thrust of appeal that animal rights should be central to the animal rights movement. However, I do not believe that her reasoning shows it is unwise to rely on a fuller spectrum of appeals and tactics. On the contrary her concession that extrinsic appeals have had positive effects—as they demonstratively have—and her logical failure to establish her invariably negative associations with extrinsic appeals, given the rebuttals that I offer, may help justify a judicious use of extrinsic appeals in conjunction with more straightforwardly ethical arguments for the treatment of animals.

However, I submit that it is ethically virtuous and pragmatically sound to be concerned with promoting human health, a sound environment, and efficacious medical research as well as the just treatment of animals. Indeed, the environmental impacts of animal agriculture do not only extend to humans. Should ethical people not care about these things? We should not care about them to the exclusion of animal rights, but that is obviously not what I am suggesting. I am merely showing that it is overly simplistic to try to utterly separate the so-called extrinsic appeals from ethically-concerned intrinsic appeals, and that we need a more pluralistic, flexible, and situationist ethic and mode of thinking. The animal rights movement is strongest with, as Tom Regan often puts it, "many hands on many oars." The movement is weakened if some of those oars are

disdainfully neglected.

References

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